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LOVE KNOWS NO LAW

Translated from the French of
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· NEW YORK ·
Worthington Co · 747 Broadway ·

Issued monthly. Subscription, $3.00. May, 1892

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BY

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ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
WORTHINGTON COMPANY
747 BROADWAY
1892

Love Knows No Law.

I.

For the third time since leaving Montreal, the passengers on a westward-bound train beheld the light of a new day from the windows of their enormous rolling dormitory. For the third time the parching rays of a July sun fell obliquely on the corridor-on-wheels in which the passengers of the Canadian Pacific were forced to kill so many hours looking out on some of the most monotonous, and some of the most picturesque, scenes the wide world can show.

Just at present the view was tame and dreary enough, the heat and dust sufficiently oppressive to warrant the air of profound lassitude with which a certain young tourist, turning his back to the engine, leant languidly backward and contemplated the wide miles of disappearing country flying rearward. Our lonely traveller, incredible as it may seem, thus lost and isolated in mid-Canada, about half way between the Pacific and Atlantic, by every outward sign and semblance belonged to the most characteristic section of Parisian youth.

Indeed if he had suddenly put in an appearance at Dieppe or Trouville, without the alteration of a single item in his dress, not a French promenader would have doubted for a moment that he had steamed out of the depot Saint-Lazare four hours earlier. He was irreproachably costumed in mouse-colored flannel, silk stockings, polished ankle-shoes, necktie of peacock blue, and wide-brimmed straw hat surrounded with fantastically-blazoned ribbon of white watered silk. Those who are well informed in latter-day fashions will be able to establish from these details the date of the opening of our veracious history, which is too recent to need more conventional specification.

To sum up the portraiture of the young traveller, let us say that he was exceedingly well favored, although one might regret that nature had not given him another inch or two of stature. To say that his face wore an intelligent outlook is to add but little, for all Parisians of a certain clique are gifted thus, just as the members of a different set look unmistakably *rich*. His hair and mustache were of that happily-blended tint that, in the eyes of blondes, has all the attractions of a dark complexion, and, in the favor of brunettes, the fascination of old-gold. For the rest, we may aver that, mentally as well as physically, our traveller represented a felicitous medium between the defects and virtues, the inconveniences and advantages of his day and generation.

Nevertheless, through the mere fact of his pres-

ence near the hundredth degree of longitude west, the young Viscount Alain de Lavandien rose above the million. It seems apparent that, before another twenty years have flown, our nation will have pushed the craze for "globe-trotting" to lengths not previously anticipated. But to-day if you encounter a young Frenchman, travelling for pleasure, half-way to the Antipodes, you may safely conclude that he is not the first of his set that has made the journey. And, from all appearances, one thus carefully and fashionably dressed would not be taken for a man in lowly search of fortune.

Let us remark that it is possible to travel for amusement and yet not find the faintest pleasure in the operation. One thing the viscount had experienced: that, during three days and nights, he had had time and opportunity to have forgotten the fact that he was gifted with a tongue. He did not understand a syllable of English, and his travelling companions had the bad taste to use that idiom. And what companions!

Turning round, he could see numbers of them sprawling on the seats of the smoking-car. They seemed to smoke all day. Others occasionally passed him, in shirt and pants, cumbered with soap and towel, on their way to the lavatory. The dress of the majority, recently purchased in Ottawa or Montreal, was of a character to weigh upon the nerves of a Parisian heavily, as well from cut as color. That of others, having lost all semblance both of cut and color through long wear, bore un-

mistakable traces of the geologic products of the Great North West. For the most part, their linen was prudently concealed, save in the case of a clergyman in immaculate stand-up collar—one of a class who possess the art of travelling from pole to pole without a speck of dust upon their clothes, or a wrinkle on their faces or shirt-fronts.

Very many of these rough travellers were of colossal stature, and, by their simple contiguity, seemed to reduce the viscount's size to Lilliputian proportions. At the same time, by reason of their outrageous foot-wear, formidable brogans, worn-out canvas shoes, soiled and embroidered slippers, incongruous products of the country Crispins of every quarter of the globe, they irritated the young aristocrat contemplating his own irreproachable shoes, and were classed by him, in sarcastic silence, as barbarians pure and simple. If they would only have kept their feet to themselves, in the direction propriety dictates! So far from that, De Lavandien, opening his eyes after a disturbed siesta, had more than once discovered a pair of boots, inhabited, an inch or two each side of his exclusive cheeks, in one case touching them. They belonged to the traveller on the seat behind him, thus making himself comfortable at other people's cost, provoking, reckless shoulder-shrugs and desperate rollings of the eye, which in his own particular set would have cost the outraged viscount half a dozen duels. But few indeed of these agricultural giants seemed to be aware of the Parisian's presence, let

alone disquiet themselves in regard to what he thought or did not think. And as the need for sympathy is probably at bottom the strongest characteristic of the Gallic race, Alain, it must be confessed, was beyond doubt already homesick.

To tell the truth, many another in his position would have felt the same. If he turned toward the oncoming horizon, the thin bright lines of steel were lost to sight in one converging streak; if to the disappearing acres he had traversed, the same monotonous effect appeared from the windows of his Pullman car. At first distinct and separately polished, the two metallic ribbons gradually coalesced and were at last confounded in one inflexible, inexorably-straight line, which cut the visible Canadian prairies in half with geometrical precision. Not one little knoll or gentle valley lent attraction to the tired eye. Nothing to be seen save in the distance a small black spot that denoted the most recent of their halting-places, a depot long since left behind.

Impossible to paint the impress of solitude and forsakenness that marked this desert without boundary or end, where the sand of the Sahara is replaced by a tough and stubbly grass with blades an inch in width, already by the torrid sunshine robbed of its attractive graceful green! This harsh earth-covering resembles the juicy emerald carpet of our Normandy pasture-fields as the reed jacket manufactured by a savage resembles the velvet mantle woven for a queen.

Nevertheless, where the lines of earth and sky commingled in the golden haze of the midsummer morning, a vague appearance made one guess the presence of the outskirts of a mighty forest. But our young Parisian was no longer deceived. Since the preceding evening, toward sunset, he had been the victim of the same illusion, the lying promises of the mirage. Yet he was hardly able to keep his gaze from straying from this fantastic forest, save to retrace the intersecting strip of steel that stretched its polished length into the azure east.

In the midst of such vague reveries and unsatisfying visions, the young man suddenly started. The gray-uniformed darkey charged with the service of his sleeping-car, had tapped him on the shoulder, saying:

"Beauséjour next, sah."

For this depot of Beauséjour, during seventy weary hours, had the patient De Lavandien waited. At last he would soon be able once again to talk in his beloved mother tongue, unless he had forgotten it, and look on a familiar face. He threads the smoking-car, and enters the enormous common dormitory, which, as though by enchantment, had already changed its nightly visage; the make-shift couches and bed-coverings have disappeared. Next he verifies his various articles of baggage, puts a silver dollar in the darkey's palm, and on the platform awaits the stopping of the train. The prodigious iron serpent, two hundred yards from end to end, under the irresistible traction of the vacuum-

brake, shrieks and trembles and struggles down to a snail's pace, destined not to come to final standstill till, two dreary days ahead, it finds a resting-place by the Pacific, on the Vancouver quay. As soon as the wheels were still, our traveller leaped down upon the prairie. Not a trace to be seen, not a vestige of a platform, let alone the customary adjuncts of a depot. Worse than all, not a trace of the carriage and pair destined to waft him, bag and baggage, to the farm he was about to honor with his promised visit.

"I think I must have got off on the wrong side of the train," he soliloquized. "As soon as the cars draw out I shall behold the station, and, which concerns me even more, my friend Maurice de Cléguérec in waiting with his turn-out."

Notwithstanding this supposition, the baggage wagon in front vomited the viscount's *impedimenta* on the same side of the way. The operation was performed with true American celerity. Then without a word of warning, bell, or whistle, the huge monster that carried so many people to their various destinations drew off in solemn, almost surly silence, leaving, in token of its passage, a solitary passenger broken-heartedly returning the civil hand-waves of the cheerful colored guard.

Not an obstacle now stood between our Parisian and a fuller if not more satisfactory view of the illimitable prairie. In vain, however, he searched for any trace of human habitation. Prairie, and prairie only, deserted, taciturn, not actually quite

as flat as it had seemed before, because he saw it now from the level of the earth. A paltry elevation a few feet in height blocked out a part of the horizon some half a league or so to the north. Everywhere else the infinite flat country stretched without betraying the existence of a shanty.

"Some terrible mistake," groaned De Lavandien with a hearty shiver.

Then he began to hallo at the top of his voice, as people in distress do in the bush, although the train was almost out of sight, a tawny spot half lost in silver vapor each moment growing smaller to the view.

Suddenly the traveller beheld a rickety post, bearing a time-worn board with the inscription: "Beauséjour." This post, this sign, a folded red flag lying on the grass, waved by rare travellers anxious to board a passing train, were the sole signs of this putative station. Alain opined they formed, perhaps, sufficient preparation for the parting guest, inadequate accommodation for a new arrival. Fortunately the day was radiantly fine—too radiant, in fact, for the sun seemed ambitious to set the prairie on fire, although, as yet, it was hardly 8 o'clock in the morning.

In accordance with inevitable custom, our shipwrecked mariner of a novel kind began to take an inventory of his *flotsam* and *jetsom*—in a word, his baggage. Not an article was missing—an imposing covered basket that contained his shirts, whose gloss vied with the brightest porcelain from Sat-

suma, leather portmanteau for occasional outings, portable trunk of statuettes and bric-a-brac, case of breechloading gun and rifle, roll of overcoats, rugs, walking-sticks and umbrellas, hat-box, and grip-sack for a pair of slippers, brushes, and a night-gown—one and all were there, save for a conspicuous film of desert dust, as safe and sound as when he had steamed out of Paris. Never, since the day when it emerged in all its brilliant youth from the Creator's fashioning hand, had the prairie borne a similar encumbrance of magnificent baggage.

The inventory taken, our Parisian Robinson Crusoe took a temporary seat on his valise, and taking out and opening a blue umbrella, reflected that at any rate the westward train would pass the same time on the morrow, while that returning east would hardly, without a special miracle, go by the post of Beauséjour until near nightfall.

"Yonder monkey, Cléguérec, by all that's sacred, should have been here to welcome me. *Sacré!* am I *mistaken in the date?*"

Fumbling in his pockets he drew out a letter he had received from Maurice, in New York. It was indeed that very day, at the hour when the train for Vancouver was due (there was but one a day) that his entertainer had promised to receive him "at Beauséjour depot!"—in order to drive him home to "The Hermitage," for so his settlement was called.

"Where on earth *is* 'The Hermitage?'" asked he anew. "Probably behind that little reach of rising ground. Let me make a voyage of discovery to

find out what's upon the farther side. True, it is broiling hot, the way is long, and I cannot make the company 'responsible' for my baggage by depositing it in the Left Parcels Office; but I must venture, all the same."

Not only was it hot, but he was somewhat hungry, and particularly thirsty. . . . After all, Maurice's letter was eight days old, more than time enough to allow of one's dying of hunger or being led into captivity by painted savages. Still——

Still seated in the soothing shade of his blue parasol, poor Alain thought and thought what he had better do, as if the embarrassment of several alternatives were his. Already the countles native population of prairie-dogs, inoffensive creatures, half rat, half rabbit, had emerged from the holes to which the passing train had sent them scuttling, and were considering the new arrival with a curiosity not altogether rude. On the other hand, the viscount gave them scant attention. He was unable to remove his fascinated eyes from the gleaming double train-track, fringed on either side by a heterogeneous litter such as passengers and railway cooks throw overboard—smashed dishes, empty bottles, jars that once had held preserves and pickles, and the inevitable milk-can, with its variety of labels. Overhead stretched the iron thread, mysterious telegraphic link, one end of which touched Paris, darling Paris! But for many a coming hour these two elements of modern civilization, steam and electricity, would be entirely useless to

him—useless as to the tiny four-legged philosophers now gambolling in the burning grass.

Suddenly the viscount's face, overclouded with anxiety for the half hour past, cleared up anew. A genuine thought illumined his darkened mind, a name rose to his lips.

"Dear Simone—could you see me *now!*"

He was upon the point of smiling, but ere the smile had fairly dawned, it died.

"No doubt at all I'm a most ridiculous object, and Simone would fairly laugh herself into hysterics if she set eyes upon me now."

And then, still screened by that blue umbrella, he wondered whether the situation was more characterized by the sublime or the ridiculous. Analyzing thus the strong and weak points of his potential heroism, his left hand, from his low seat, had mechanically glided to one of his aforesaid ankle-shoes, whose raven polish, contrary to all established laws of physics, seemed to have contracted and to be contracting momently beneath the fiery sunshine.

An oath, subdued and semi-gentle, rose for utterance. Let us hope the viscount merely anathematized his shoemaker.

II.

At this moment a tiny speck became apparent on the crest that closed the north horizon. Rapidly approaching, it grew larger as it advanced, and soon the viscount could distinguish a one-horse vehicle, then that it was tenanted by somebody. It was a country cross between a tilbury and buggy. At a quarter of a mile off it looked no larger than one of those flimsy microscopic chariots whose slender wheels cause the dust to fly in hippodromes on racing-days.

Arriving at the iron road, the buggy stopped. The youthful driver sprang to earth with wonderful agility. Two seconds afterward the spanking bay was hitched to a telegraph post. Then Maurice de Cléguérac marched up with hands extended to his visitor, who stood regarding him with a mixture of surprise and admiration.

Indeed, the newcomer seemed bubbling over with health and animal spirits. But wedded to this health appeared the nervous slimness often seen in those whose energy is overflowing. This kind of figure made him seem taller than he really was, and not so old. Nobody would have imagined he was very nearly thirty. Without having masculine "beauty" in the "professional" degree (a less de-

sirable possession in the sterner sex) he was uncommonly handsome. His wavy chestnut hair, pronounced and rounded chin, and well-shaped, undisfigured mouth, whose mobile lips were sentient with thought, every careless line and grace about him, to the great straw hat thrown jauntily upon his curls, caused one to think of some adventurous, forceful cavalier by Velasquez, whose outward calm but masks the inner fires of ambition. This Breton with the Spanish eyes must have certainly sprung from Celtic stock, mysteriously grafted to Iberian ancestry in some nebulous and prehistoric natural migration.

"Do forgive me for keeping you waiting," said the Parisian's host. "It all happened through Annie. She got up and got out this morning without my leave; and when it became necessary to harness not a horse was on the premises. You see what a large dose of indulgence must be extended by the stranger within our gates, bag and baggage——"

As he pronounced the word "baggage," Cléguérac suddenly interrupted himself. The pile of luggage Viscount de Lavandien had brought along with him at that instant forcibly struck his eyes.

"The deuce!" cried Cléguérac, twirling his mustache.

Alain excused himself, though slightly out of countenance.

"I think it *would* have been better had I left my larger chest in New York City."

"No, no. It is I that am to blame, for not reflecting that I had a Parisian for my guest, and not a mountain scout. What folly that I did not bring the 'democrat.'"

"The 'democrat,'" repeated Alain, not knowing the significance of the word.

"We call a 'democrat' here what you call an 'omnibus' in Europe, or something very like it. But do not let us dillydally longer here. Get in."

Lavandieu passively obeyed, not daring even to hint that any harm or diminution might happen to the luckless baggage, let alone that he might never see it more. Already he submitted to the steady magnetism of Cléguérac's eyes, in turn instinct with the sentiments of an ever-victorious warrior, or pregnant with the darkling thought of one who is often forced to resign himself to the deep waters of fate. As soon as the companions were sardined into the very narrow buggy, Maurice shouted:

"Sit firm, my boy, sit firm! The mare goes like the wind at the start."

"She hardly looks it," smiled Lavandien.

Indeed, with head hung low and limbs a little chunky for her slender ribs, tail and mane in the state of nature, and pelt reeking with perspiration, Annie had more the appearance of a country surgeon's nag than of a fiery highflyer. However, at the first appeal by word of mouth from her master, the bay took a formidable bound, making tracks at a gallop, rather obliquely, it is true, for the deserted stable. The bumping would have been se-

vere upon the best of roads, but one might well ask how the thick, clumsy wooden wheels resisted the unceremonious dance of the vehicle over the prairie inequalities. Lavandien kept silence in his own despite, although no coward, and pretty well acquainted with every danger that a man may incur, whether *on* or *behind* a horse. Deceived by this continued dumbness, said Cléguérac:

"Don't be alarmed, dear boy. Presently, when the remaining two horses come home from the plow-tail, we will harness the 'democrat' and go in quest of your invaluable traps."

"If my 'invaluable traps' are where we left them," their owner insinuated, rather gloomily.

"Alas, my dear cousin—we *are* related distantly, if memory still holds her seat—would to heaven that this country was sufficiently thickly populated to justify your fears. Within a radius of half a dozen miles, I have one single neighbor, a very worthy man, whose house you shall presently see."

"And a depot was—*built*—for *two* inhabitants!"

"I might answer that the superfine quality of these inhabitants makes up for their scarcity. And that the expenses of station, so far, have not exactly bankrupted the Canada Pacific, I think you must admit. But, with the months will come a population; and, for all one knows, I may at this very moment be driving one of our future units."

"You hardly anticipated the possibility of a visit from me; admit as much."

"No. Since the time in which a young St.

Cyrien of my acquaintance used to meet you every day and everywhere, Sundays, and at the dinner-table of your friends, I learned you had become, almost from the college exit, a regular society man. What have you done that forces you for refuge to the Great Northwest. Have you, in a mad moment, spurred by the thorn of friendship or of usury, committed forgery, or, still worse, murder? Or, at the least, are you in search of rest from some mysterious fever of despair or love?"

"You do well to laugh, cousin," said Lavandien. "But wait for my confession."

"The laws of hospitality oblige me to open my doors to you without exacting an avowal of your crimes. But you have neither the appearance nor the get-up, and certainly not the *baggage*, of an assassin or—a failure."

"Thanks for that certificate of meritorious baggage, friend. At such an hour I understand the force of your remark. Be generous in the midst of my misfortunes."

At the same head-splitting speed they had by then reached the apex of the crest which marked, it seemed, a smiling valley and toy river; but this little stream, which Cléguérac had often crossed at a bound, sufficed to change the entire aspect of the country. The north side of the stream being slightly faster than the south, had arranged the welcome visual surprise of a series of miniature bluffs, on whose banks grew clumps of trees, not very large truly, but yet in variety, for many miles

around. Thus, winding peacefully on, the course of Moose Brook was traceable in a placid dark-green ribbon, intersected from reach to reach by microscopic islands of luxuriant reeds, and even willows. On either bank stretched cultivated fields, far as the eye could reach.

"Allow me to point out to you my domain, 'The Hermitage.' Only a little farther on you will behold the mansion."

And, pointing to a lofty chimney like a gigantic stovepipe, he added:

"That is my Beetroot-sugar Factory. Now you see my horses at work. You have seen nearly all there is to see."

Alain, an enthusiastic sportsman, gazed pensively at the horses who were scoring the fertile fields with black furrows innumerable, surrounded at long intervals by skeleton palisades.

"But where are the buildings?" asked he at last. "I perceive neither sugar refinery, house, nor stable—not an erection of the humblest kind."

"And no more do you see a field infirmary, nor a hen-house, neither forge nor outhouse," went on Cléguérac, laughing. "For pity's sake, good cousin, have a care my horses do not overhear you. They are healthy and contented enough *as they are*."

"But tell me, What do they eat when snow is on the ground? And that there is no lack of snow for four or five months of the year, I am informed."

"They do as their companions have to do in the

state of nature. When they are hungry, paw away the snow with their hoofs. You go-ahead people have been for centuries trying to make the horse an insupportable, exacting, morbid, hot-house animal; let us say, for the sake of argument, a woman. Take up the cudgels, my friend; you are now at fountain-head of the school of agricultural science of the future."

"That calls itself?"

"The Society for Suppressing Exaggerated Civilization. If we do not wish the fruit tree to perish, we must graft a more robust slip where it branches. Such is the virile history, in brief, of nations."

Suddenly the road became so rough that it was absolutely necessary to slacken the vehicle. A sharp natural declivity led to Moose Brook. At the same moment a little wooden hut covered with drab paint, of very poor appearance, appeared on the opposite crest only a few yards off. Rough zigzags, cut and fashioned in the hardened clay, served as a tricky approach to the humble terrace, flanked by a belvidere or rather tier of posts and rough veranda that but ill supported the clumsy roof.

"This is 'The Hermitage!'" exclaimed Lavandien, with some suspicion of uneasiness.

"No. 'Tis the 'Gray House,' the dwelling of my only neighbor," answered Cléguérac in a low voice.

Saying this, he lifted his hat without looking

round. The viscount turned his head toward the now receding cottage, and, with a start of surprise, met the gaze of a great pair of blue eyes, at once analytical and innocent. The eyes were filled with heaven's pure and lovely light.

What he next beheld after the eyes was an immense straw hat of country manufacture, ornamented with a fantastic coronet of crushed and faded artificial flowers, in a way that spoke volumes for the toughness that had enabled them to grow so old without dispetalment. But one forgot the hat to see the cataract of silky flax-gold tresses that twisted and fell with an admirable irregularity a couple of feet or more below it, rolling an avalanche of lovely locks over its wearer's shoulders, and even encroaching on her eyebrows in high disdain of any other feature.

The unknown, whose head of hair had been the envy of an empress, to all appearance did not own a looking-glass to set her locks in decent order. But this fawn-like untidiness possessed such subtle magnetism that one naturally wished to know whether the young lady's toilet errors sprang from innocence or coquetry.

Another question that immediately arose was, How old is this extraordinary girl? For her figure, already magnificently formed, showed that she had long ago paid her adieux to childhood; while her dress, of faded tartan plaid, not otherwise unbecoming, showed quite a liberal allowance of ankle. The development of this living enigma bespoke a

woman of twenty, her dress a girl of twelve. But the eyes, those stars of woman's face, showed no more signs of age than the bright stars which hang in everlasting youth forever virgin in the sky.

"In addition to your virtuous, if only crony, it seems you have a lady neighbor of magnificent loveliness," exclaimed the viscount, who had noticed nothing but the young girl's bust and eyes and gleaming flood of hair.

"The very idea! She always seems to me no more a woman than some apprentice circus acrobat," protested Maurice warmly, who had only taken notice of the scanty skirt.

This unfortunate article had been a fixed friend of his, or nearly so, for now four years. Once or twice, it is true, the robe had seemed to suddenly grow longer; then, by slow degrees, to take its former resting-place above the shoes. But, since the preceding winter, it had proved impossible to stretch the dress anew, and Cléguérac, absorbed in agricultural and industrial problems, had really hardly asked himself the reason why.

"Little did I think to come across a censor so severe in the desert!" cried Alain with a careless laugh. "To-day you're not a whit more gallant than your neighbor. What, not one word of greeting?"

"Seldom. Besides, her father is a German."

"The deuce! You stand no chance, then. The very thought of having but one neighbor, and having the misfortune to stumble on a German!"

"Well, here's 'The Hermitage,'" announced

Cléguérac, indicating, half a league off in the valley, a habitation of a far more comfortable aspect.

"Aha! cousin, you ape the French pavilion as though you were an ambassador in exile."

"I'm no ambassador, but for all, servant, help, or chamberlain, I own a battered mariner who has a passion for bunting. On Sundays and high holidays we hoist our several flags sky-high. Your arrival is most certainly a feast-day; let Rabat have the credit of the colors."

The friends were now at their destination. In little more than half an hour the breathed and heated nag had traversed a good seven miles, all in the stride, save that she had turned once slightly out of the road to take a drink at a small pool without leave asked or given—a breach of equine etiquette that had sorely scandalized Lavandien, a sportsman of the regulation school. Hardly less overcome was he when Maurice proceeded to unharness the perspiring steed himself, leaving her instantly to graze the neighboring grass at her own sweet will.

At the same moment, Rabat put in an appearance with the well-known call: "Breakfast's ready, gentlemen."

Outside of horses and all that appertains in any shape or form to horses, Rabat could turn his hand to anything, from shaking up a mattress to a pancake. But his pet vanities concentrated round two widely different talents: one was to be able to enumerate and describe more clearly than any one

else the different parts and functions of maritime fortresses; the other was to be able to cook ham in twenty different ways, all equally tasty and digestible.

With such *menus* as Rabat could get up, composed of prairie chicken, omelettes, and ham in half a dozen indistinguishable styles, it was not as a theoretic gunner that the old salt proved of the greatest service in his present place.

For beverages the comrades had their choice of spring-water and *café-au-lait*, the last the natural drink of the Canadian. Maurice did the honors of his house and table with all his old-time grace and cordiality.

"I do not blush to set before you what I do," said the host, "because I give you all I have. And then you know under whose roof you are: a man seeking ever profitable ends, which I decline to pay too much for. Certes, my life is rude, laborious, but it has its fascinations. Were it not for the isolation——"

"Who or what prevents you ending it?"

"Through the gangway of marriage? Cousin, the idea of bringing a real woman, let alone a lady, *here!* The problem is a risky one, to say the least of it."

"You find it so?" said Alain, who seemed much struck with the objection.

"Assuredly. For a marriage to prove a moderate success under such adverse conditions, it would need the wife to be a prodigy, the husband perfect.

Leaving out of the question the necessity of hunting for a prodigy, let us come to the question of my own perfection. But I imagine that you hardly think me so," cried Cléguérac with a merry laugh. "Your parents should have cited my example as an example not to follow. Indeed, I have to ask myself how it came about that they permitted you to pay a visit to such a very ill-conducted cousin."

"Well, I must tell you one thing," said the young Frenchman with some embarrassment. "My father thinks me still in New York; and, you may be sure, it was not he that counselled me to call at 'The Hermitage.' But, during my three tedious days' transit, not to speak of the still more tedious nights, I often asked myself how it came about you left the service to become a mid-Canadian colonist."

"If you put the question to me, it is my duty to myself to answer it; and, if you ask me, I am far from whining that I am forgotten. Have no fear of my history proving long or tedious, however painful it may be. You shall not have to blush for your relation."

"You spin your story out with bootless words," protested Lavandien, lighting a cigarette. "Blue blood will never stoop to tell a lie."

"Perhaps. But it may course the veins more warmly than convenient; a thing that happened to a certain lieutenant of my acquaintance. One day, leaving Paris at the end of a furlough, it became necessary for me to visit the War Office for instructions. I was in civilian garb, in a great hurry,

and I made the mistake of not shutting a certain door after me. Observe by what a rusty hook hang human destinies. Had there but been an automatic spring to that accursed door, I might to-day have been a captain or a colonel. In any case, I should certainly not have been *here*."

"I am exceedingly sorry when I reflect there was no spring," smiled the viscount.

"Thank you for chorus. However that may be, the official head then present, a puffy, portly man, directed me to shut the door behind me in no very courteous terms. Had you but known me at that fire-eating epoch of my life! . . . Without a word I closed it, remaining on the inside, and, equally without a word, I laid my card upon the page that he was writing, so close to his nose I must have ruffled his mustache."

"Good, good!" cried Lavandien. "I smell a lovely duel."

"It was not the desire to do no more that withheld me. Only, I, as lieutenant, was forced to observe a certain etiquette to my superior officer masquerading as a head-clerk. This personage informed me of the tedious stumbling-block, in bombastic words, retaining my card. What could I do save make my exit, choking with concentrated wrath, and regain my regiment. Two days afterward my colonel, now General de Berdons, sent for me to his august presence."

"He has a charming daughter," put in Alain.

"I know it well, for he became my best friend in

the sequel. You will guess he hardly sent for me to offer me his daughter's heart and hand, especially as she was very young. He sentenced me to sixty days in a fortified place, and then made me go through the ordeal of listening to a lecture on the account of our bureaucrat, accused me of having tried to provoke my superior officer, neither more nor less. And I have to thank my colonel for sparing me a court-martial in virtue of my brilliant antecedents. I passed two weary months in Besançon citadel, pondering the theoretic virtues of meekness, and, on the sixty-first, sent in my resignation."

"The deuce take such an exaggerated report!"

"My resignation accepted, I travelled far and near, distrustful of my temper. I even came out here, like yourself, a curious tourist. Then, when I felt at liberty to exercise my spleen without the risk of sixty days in a fortress—that is to say, at the expiration of a twelvemonth—I paid a second visit to the famous bureau. This time I took particular care to leave the door ajar behind me. My enemy, then sitting writing at the self-same table, asked me, almost civilly this time, to repair my neglect. 'I have neglected nothing, sir,' I said. The poor devil looked at me keenly and remembered me. 'It was for *this* you sent in your resignation,' he asked in singularly melancholy tones. One might have said that he foresaw the future. 'Yes!' I cried, crossing my arms six inches from his face. 'It *was* for that.' . . . We fought upon the morrow.

He received a sword thrust, under which he lingered for six weeks, then died."

"The old ninny!" exclaimed Alain. "And you might well say that you were hot-headed. But the days are gone by when it is necessary to expatriate one's self for an *unfortunate* duel."

Cléguérac reddened and remained mute for a few seconds. He went on, not without visible embarrassment:

"My duel *was* unfortunate, even for my private fortune. To kill a man is a serious thing under any circumstances; much more when the deceased leaves behind him a wife and children entirely unprovided for. At that period I passed a number of nights that I hardly like to call to mind. As I cling to my natural allowance of peaceful sleep, I took measures to recover my capacity for it; and it was then I achieved the reputation of a reckless gambler impelled by all the imps of Beelzebub."

"I can guess the name of the game that cost you so dear," cried de Lavandien, seeing his cousin in a novel light. "You had only to complete the reparation by marrying one of the girls."

"I preferred to facilitate their marriages with others. But virtue has its limitations. All was doubtless for the best, thanks to General de Berdons, who stood a true friend to me. Thanks to his devotion, the poor fatherless girls dreamed of I know not what celestial windfall. . . . As for your present friend, with the rest of the money he acquired the title to the farm on which this house is

built. At the end of a year, other friends having invested funds in 'The Hermitage,' a sugar-boiling house was built. . . . So now you have my history. The moment is at hand that I may count on yours, if you possess one."

"I have. Only it will not gain by coming after yours. I must admit that I have grown quite timid since I became acquainted with your genuine character. You may make fun of me!"

"My dear cousin, I *often* make fun at my own expense; *never* at that of other people."

"Hum. . . . Not two hours ago, perceiving my prodigious pile of baggage——"

"*Misericordia!* I had forgotten all about them. Now I will to saddle for my inspectorial rounds. As for you, take a gentle nap. Organize your comfort and accommodation with Rabat. Smoke, read, amuse yourself. Stay, here is the Assiniboine *Morning Star*, one of last week's, and in English. You don't read English? Ah, *Boulevardier!* I will try and be back quite soon. We will dine, and you will tell me your history. I hope the silver thread of *love* runs through it."

"Love is not lacking," said Alain with a sigh, "but——"

"*Chut!* not another word. It is so very seldom that I go to plays, I do not want to *know the plot*."

III.

THE day passed quickly. Alain, no friend at any time to solitude, set Rabat's tongue a-going, who, as it happened, had an equal aversion to silence. Then, the covered wagon having brought his luggage home, the traveller unpacked the smaller moiety, just enough to set his dressing-room in order. To bathe and dress next occupied the time till dinner.

During those hours Maurice was engaged in far more arduous duties. He came home toward 7 o'clock, changed his clothes, and the two friends now found themselves at table with the gayety of youth and an appetite that is peculiar to the prairies. At length when tea, under the garb of black coffee, had been served in front of the house, cigarettes were once more lighted, and the host exacted the narration of the promised history.

"You will reproach me with beginning at the end," said Lavandien, "but it is the easiest way. Well, my dear friend, I have the honor to inform you that I am engaged."

Cléguérac bowed respectfully, and answered with exaggerated gravity:

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-four."

"You are going to get married at four-and-twenty years of age! Yet you pretended, only this morning, that my adventures took away your breath. Why, cousin, you appear to me a perfect giant, and therefore I am timid in my turn. Imagine it—engaged! I will lay a wager that it was your mother made the match to save you from the talons of the harpies!"

"No," answered Lavandien modestly. "It was *I*—or rather *we*—who made the match."

The piercing gaze of the young farmer sought the hero's countenance, where every thought shone through like amber pebbles in a silver brook.

"Would it be indiscreet of me," asked Maurice, "if I were to ask you, Is the lady French?"

"My good friend, what a question! I have never been in favor of exotic marriages."

"The best of luck. I thought perhaps it was a fair American, who had proved too sweet for you in New York City; even, perhaps, upon the ocean line. Such things have happened.

"Tell me the whole story, now; we never see a girl in France select her husband for herself. Patience! The time is at hand when we will no longer exclaim, hearing of the accomplishment of this act of common sense: 'It must have been a Yankee!'"

"Cousin, you are the Lafayette of the marriage contract. And now, if you do not wish me to die of curiosity, tell me what you are doing in the Great Northwest, six thousand miles or more from your *fiancée?*"

"Ah, that's the nominative case!" sighed Lavandien, coming down to mundane matters. "Decidedly I had better have begun at the beginning. In the first place (I confide the name to you because you are a man of honor), I am to marry Mademoiselle Simone de Montdauphin. Are you acquainted with her?"

"Those who are marriageable girls to-day were children when *I* was in society," observed Maurice.

"Very true. Well, then, it shall suffice to say she is distinguished, clever, very pretty. Twenty-three years of age, and lives with her mother, who is a widow. As for her pedigree, you have heard of the Montdauphins?"

Cléguérac waved his hand for answer, waiting for developments, the impersonation of the inevitable *but*.

"For all that, would you believe it," continued poor Alain, "at first my parents did not countenance the match. When I broached my prospects to my father—my resolution, shall I say?—he answered: 'My friend, I have habitually figured, in my own mind, that the minimum entertainable dowry *for your wife* should be eight hundred thousand francs. But Mademoiselle Montdauphin, it is true, has personal advantages of no mean order. Prove to me that she's a demi-millionaire, and you have my consent. If, on the contrary, you cannot, think no more of her. Now—she comes nowhere near the latter figure."

"The dickens, my dear fellow! After that, I

prognosticate but scanty filial obedience, in another year, when you come of age."

"I wish to avoid disobedience, and Simone approves my wishes. Thus I am limited to laying before my father that I am overhead in love, and that my attachment is lifelong. So, you will understand, while redoubling my attentions and keeping our love more brilliantly aflame than ever, we shrouded our appointments in mystery. But," sighing, "I suppose there are parental spies in every place, and ever will be. One fine morning my father posed me with the following ultimatum: 'Either give me your word that you will never see Mademoiselle Montdauphin again, or—go abroad.'"

"Aha!" cried Cléguérac, "I begin to understand. 'Twas an unhappy banished man who knocked at my door. Well, my friend, you were hardly in the wrong when you inferred your father had his scruples."

"Yes," answered Alain, lifting his head proudly, "I *am* an exile, but an exile of your own persuasion; that is to say, a man who wishes to grow self-sufficing, and who will ask you for a course of lessons in the art."

Maurice made a gesture of surprise, which his cousin took for one of admiration. Modestly the latter protested:

"The idea wasn't altogether mine. Allow me to finish my story. In point of fact, my parents think to gain their ends by superior strategy. They packed me off to New York with letters of intro-

duction, and of credit, too, to the millionaire Pauvell. Well, Pauvell has a most delightful daughter; very pretty, on my honor. You begin to understand their scheme? Next in order, you shall learn mine or rather Simone's plan. I came out here to see you, to ascertain the resources of the country. Between ourselves, I don't suppose the dear girl had the clearest of ideas. I start as a farmer. Soon I am twenty-five. Then we get married. A few short years of happy toil will pass away like magic. Some day or other my father forgives me. And there you are! What do you say to my idea?"

Maurice regarded his interlocutor with stony eyes, as though he was looking at a madman or a full-fledged soar-or-perish hero. For himself, the question promised to prove grave; and, at any rate, one thing seemed certain—that his house would never seem the same again. The previous evening, at that very hour, and seated at the self-same table, he was congratulating himself on the arrival of a visitor who would, at any rate for the time being, prove entertaining. And at this very moment, reflecting on the rôle that lay before him, he opined that peace, though purchased at the price of solitude, was precious.

What would he have thought could he have seen the coming change in his laborious, tranquil life, and, reading the future, guessed that the preceding evening passed *tête-à-tête* with the eternal silence of the prairie, would prove the last evening

of his life destined to be untroubled with the bitterness of others, his own uncertainties or odious regrets?

Somewhat astonished by the reigning silence, Alain exclaimed:

"You do not answer, cousin."

"The answer you demand is harder far than you imagine," said Maurice. "I must take time to think, and ask you several questions, too. We will resume our conference at *déjeûner* to-morrow, on the stroke of twelve. Till then, I trust three nights in a sleeping-car will awaken your indulgence for the lowly beds we make shift to rest on at 'The Hermitage.'"

"What! I am not to see you before the middle of the day?"

"Do you wish an account of my earlier hours?" smiled Cléguérac. "At 4 o'clock the morning-gun, then a plunge in Moose Brook, a turn with the dumb-bells or on the flying-bar, a serious first breakfast. Toward five to the saddle, and a tour of inspection that must last till luncheon time—your *déjeûner*. Ah, my dear Lavandien, I don't think you have the faintest idea of what the life of a farmer in the Great Northwest inevitably means."

"No? But I wish to learn. Therefore, let me beg you to saddle two horses instead of one to-morrow morning."

"Neither do you seem to have any misgivings as to what 'the saddle,' in this country infers. To-morrow, during the day, I will enlighten you.

Then, if your heart is in the same place as at present, you shall mount. I *think* I can promise you the experiment will hardly prove monotonous. And now, allow me the honor of lighting you to your apartment."

A few minutes afterward the young viscount found himself alone in his small sleeping-room, so small that his baggage occupied a full third. In spite of his fatigue the strangeness of the sights that he had seen, disillusions already felt by instinct, and difficulties ahead, just touched so far with dainty finger-tip, drove off all thought of slumber. Above all, the ill-disguised coldness of his friend Cléguérac in regard to his projects, so altogether different from the enthusiasm he expected, seemed to freeze the faith he had, or rather wished to have. As faithful servants of the Lord in similar cases have resort to prayer, so did this faithful neophyte of love allow his thoughts to fly to his divinity, Simone. (At that very instant Simone was driving with her mother from a grand race-ball, beneath the first rays of a sun already rising in *la belle France*.) Then our young traveller seated himself before the only table, opened his morocco blotter, and, taking a sheet of paper marvellously gold stamped with his arms and initials, began to write.

Let sticklers for extreme propriety be reassured—it was not to his betrothed that he was writing. Madame de Montdauphin, who allowed her daughter to waltz for hours at a stretch in sweetest lib-

erty, would not have permitted her to receive a single line from this very problematical lover.

But Simone had friends, and, in the circle of those friends, one writ with her in sour misfortune's book—that is to say, the victim of insufficient means whom her parents had married at the age of twenty-seven to a, till recently, young man too weary of the world, we may assume, to resist the siege with vigor and effect. While Simone was yet in search of a husband the beautiful Mathilde had already rendered hers as ridiculous on account of his unhappiness as he might have been enviable by reason of his millions. His name was Gravino, whom the king of Naples, his legitimate sovereign, had rewarded well for certain financial missions he had carried through in Paris. These missions had been the double cause of his enrichment, and of his penetration of the social circles in which he first encountered his Mathilde. The Papal nuncio married them; the Pope sent special blessings; all Paris called upon them, for our good Mathilde knew exactly where to pin her social faith, and never made new friends unless she knew that they were "safe." Under the age of thirty men had no existence for her. Gray hairs were far indeed from frightening her. Not through any unnatural dislike of golden locks, but one must pay their price for wisdom and discretion. The young, pitilessly held at bay, became good friends, it is true, either because Mathilde did not wish to

seem to slight them, or because the house, when all was said and done, was very pleasant.

Such might, perhaps, have been Lavandien's case with half a score more years upon his head. Mathilde, to make up, had devoted herself body and soul to the success of the marriage of her old-time lover to Simone. She was the link of union left between them—discreet, immaculate. Shall we blame her for reading to her young friend any letters from her daily mail that could possess the slightest interest? Was she committing a crime by writing to a traveller we wot of the daily deeds and words of such and such a lady? Besides, she was the only one, beyond the interested two, that knew the secret of the correspondence, and it amused her vastly.

Thus, it was to the Countess Gravino that Alain had taken pen to write. After all, he stood with her upon a cerain licensed platform of flirtation, watchful in style, careful of effects, but far from disagreeable.

Accordingly Lavandien gave an account of his arrival at "The Hermitage," which he depicted as a flourishing scene of enormous activity, throned in a land of poetry and of the picturesque. Beneath his facile pen the buffaloes, in countless herds, roamed the emerald prairies. As was but just, he did not quite forget the Indians, though he forgot to say that many of them were farm-hands at thirty cents a day, so as not to spoil the picture.

"We are encircled by Indians on every side, but

it would be wrong for *us* to be afraid of them. Their formerly ferocious instincts are becoming milder daily, and squabbles are of very rare occurrence. Nevertheless we go, both day and night, fully armed, so that if the occasion arose they would not find us altogether unprepared."

While in the act of writing this, he reflected that he had no revolver ready to his hand. Quitting the writing-table he carefully charged his fowling-piece, and even more complacently returned to his effusion.

"Besides, these assassins have paid dearly for the knowledge that Cléguérac's rifle has never missed its aim yet. The devil of a man is a type whose very existence you Parisians scarce suspect. To keep up a brisk fire all by himself against a dozen yelling Black Feet, to gallop for ten or twelve hours at a stretch before a band of blood-thirsty savages, to ride down a bison at killing pace, to remain for twenty-four hours in the saddle on a harvest-day, these feats to him are nothing. All the world, of whatever nationality, achieves them easily at the end of a few months of prairie-life.

"But Cléguérac was a hero from his birth. Only just turned twenty, he killed his man in a protracted duel, which causes him to be, at times, a little gloomy, somewhat misanthropic. I imagine him to be fairly accessible to the master passion, for love is a thing he esteems at its true value. However that may be, my life, which I related to him, making, of course, no mention of your name, both

occupies and interests him. We shall see what he can *yet do for us.* Be wise to note that my awful dad has not the faintest doubts as to the way in which I am utilizing the voyage he *recommended.* I am arranging for him to think me all the time in New York. Avoid the slightest indiscretion.

"And now, I must leave the kindest, sweetest friend I have on earth. Repeat, you know *to whom*, the motto that will ever be ours, 'In life—in death.' "

Lavandien signed the letter and left it in his blotting-pad until it could be mailed. Then, before going to bed, he scanned the little valley with eager eyes. A brilliant moon had spread its dusky silver carpet on the earth in places rendered vaguer by the sleepy vapors. Only on this brilliant foreground the shadow of the house fell square and swart, depicting, one might think, a massive fortress. Within as well as out of doors the silence of the infinite prairie reigned supreme.

Poetry and imagination were by no means Alain's strongest points. But the vastness and sublimity of the spectacle beneath his eyes, the novelty of the scene, the excitement of extended travel, probably even the intentional exaggeration of the pictures he had just been drawing, all these united causes *intoxicated* him with a sort of enthusiasm of which those who knew him would have deemed him incapable. Surprised and charmed with this exuberance of physical and mental life, he began to think himself, in all good faith, an object of in-

genuous admiration. A man had just appeared (in the looking-glass) to whom a rolling ocean was as nothing, who traversed immense continents in sheer sport, who would recoil before no danger, no fatigue, so that he might win the woman of his choice—achieve a fortune, all for her. This man—himself.

But why this solitude? Why these shades that doomed him to inaction? Wherefore was there no extraordinary task to be achieved, no war to wage?

"At least I wake while others sleep. We shall not be taken by surprise."

This reflection of his responsibility for the general welfare was not unpleasing. He rose and took his gun to make a watchman's round in order to see if all the doors were fast, each window latched, and no suspicious noise to tease the slumber of the night. Softly he regained the dining-chamber, which served as hall and eating-room as well. . . .

Between the wings of the wide-open door the pure cool air of night was flooding in to chase away the last effluvia of a blazing afternoon. At the distance of fifty paces from police headquarters people would have taken greater precautions against thieves and wandering lunatics. In a single second the viscount fell from his heroics to the depth of the ridiculous.

"If Cléguérac could behold me now, he would certainly laugh at me until the dawn of day."

A few minutes afterward he was in bed, having unloaded his superfluous fowling-piece.

IV.

A PLEASING, hospitable sound aroused Lavandien at seven in the morning. He opened his eyes. A chef in full costume—a veritable kitchen potentate—was laying on his table the first of the innumerable *cafés-au-lait* of the day. He recognized Rabat, and, having an excellent appetite, the view of these effective preparations chased away even the memory of his midnight illusions.

"My cousin has had his breakfast?" asked he, holding out his cup to be filled a second time.

"Yes, sir. And a more substantial one than monsieur is about to make. But monsieur told me coffee would be sufficient."

"For to-day, yes. Starting from to-morrow, place me on the same régime as your master. For I, also, mean to become a farmer."

Rabat was so much astonished that he set the pair of patent-leather shoes he had taken up to dust upon the table, where he contemplated them with the admiration sailors have for all that is extremely neat and shiny. With an air of compassion more eloquent than words, he cried:

"Ah, monsieur! do not say that. When you are a Canadian farmer I shall be an admiral."

"And why so, Monsieur Rabat?" said Alain rather nettled.

Rabat, formerly one of the most indefatigable talkers on record, did not often gain a similar opening.

"Monsieur," he answered, "I perceive my master has not told you all he has endured since we came here. Probably he remembers it but ill himself. He is a man who only sees that which he wants to see—the trouble it takes to accomplish his end he does not reckon. But as for me, I recollect. When we arrived in this country we should literally have perished of hunger, only fortunately sailors have a way of making their wants known by signs. Nobody understood us."

"I thought," said Alain, "that there were very many of our countrymen in Canada."

The ex-sailor shrugged his shoulders expressively and replied:

"Three years ago, at Wabigoon, our nearest town, you would not have found a single Frenchman. And yet they call it a city! To get a glass of cognac you must go to a drug-store. And as for its being nearest! Well, I will tell you—if twenty-seven miles is nearness! When snow is on the ground—and there is snow for five months in the year—in order to arrive at your destination, you have constantly to use a compass. You do not understand English?"

"Not yet."

"Well, monsieur, do not learn. No sooner had your cousin taken a few lessons than he had to take a course of boxing-lessons, for he was now cognizant

of the meaning of what some cried out at him as he passed by. When he had nearly slaughtered half a dozen in the national fashion, the rest began to hold their tongues. Now they take off their hats to him. But that was nothing. After the men, horses; and it was with the equine kingdom I beheld the fiercest battles. Ah, monsieur! I would sooner pass the bar of Senegal in a toy canoe. I was as seasick as a soldier merely looking on. At other times a dozen of the vile brutes would take it into their crazy heads to run away. Then came a chase! Sixty, eighty miles on horseback—three nights on the prairie with a packet of sandwiches. And this but the beginning of the undertaking. Imagine the land to be levelled, kitchen constructed, the tardy chills of spring, the early frosts of autumn, sick horses, broken-down vehicles, and the getting and keeping Indian workmen from the reserve. But I am foolish. You were surely jesting, monsieur. Farmer! What a misfortune! You have a profession that is worth much more; your baggage is sufficient to show that."

Rabat was admiring Alain's enormous pile of baggage. The latter, declining to carry on conversation with one so tediously verbose, asked for hot water and at what o'clock the mail arrived.

Rabat's white cap, which since the commencement of the interview had been gradually mounting to the top of his head, now fell forward almost to his eyebrows.

"The mail, monsieur? Sometimes there is a

mail to Wabigoon—occasionally. There it awaits our calling. But as we do not often expect letters, we do not go on purpose. We take advantage of some business in the town, or wait. Ah, monsieur! you are by no means the first Parisian who took a fancy to become acquainted with the prairies. I never saw one yet hold out a month. With all due respect to monsieur, I give him fifteen days."

Alain shrugged his shoulders, but in vain did he endeavor to make light of this old babbler's whimperings. In spite of himself his enthusiasm of the night before evaporated like a midsummer mist.

"And why, may I ask, do *you* condescend to remain in such a heaven-forsaken country?" he asked satirically.

"Oh, as for me," replied the ancient mariner, "I laugh at mails and letters; I don't know how to write. Monsieur," here he approached Alain and lowered his voice as though they were surrounded by eaves droppers, "'tis all on account of a woman that you behold me in this unhappy country."

"A woman in the old man's case as well—poor devil," mused Lavandien.

His ill-humor changed into fraternal charity. A word of encouragement it seemed his duty to administer.

"Well, well, my hero, I hope the quarrel may be yet patched up, and that the next thing we shall hear of will be your marriage."

A spasm of consternation and anger distorted the old seaman's weather-beaten features.

"Our marriage, monsieur! You don't know Zetie! 'Twas she who ran after me, even from the instant of my landing. I wanted to establish myself at Bordeaux, which is my native place; she forced me to flee prematurely—flee far and wide. I tried five places more in various countries. In one and all of those five places I beheld her bearing sheer on to board me, grappling-irons out——"

"She is a wealthy woman?" queried Lavandien. "The travels that you made her take must have cost a fortune."

"She is a stewardess on a passenger steamer!" groaned the contumacious lover. "We became acquainted in China, a little while before the Formosa campaign. She is a countrywoman of mine. If a poor devil of a sailor was forced to marry all his countrywomen! But *this* time I think I have given her the slip serene, she and her little cabin-boy, of whom she wanted to make me a present thrown into the contract, notwithstanding that his hair was as crinkly as a high-caste negro's. If ever I see her steamer rounding the quay at Wabigoon, I will give in and marry her. Monsieur, you have had a good look at me. I am no more a coward than my fellow-man; but I know Zetie, and I know she has more vitriol than holy-water for me."

"You folk are all the same," said Alain, for whom this tale of infidelity in low life had but little interest. "Make ready for my toilet, please, and leave the room."

An hour afterward he quitted his chamber and

repaired to the veranda for a little fresh air. Though it was only ten by his watch, the boarding that served for promenade was cracking beneath the impetuous sunshine, in haste to make the world forget five months of frost-bit winter. He took refuge in Maurice's study, where huge piles of stores preserved a certain relative coolness. Heaven knows how much he would have given at that moment for a current *Figaro*. But he beheld no other journal save the Assiniboine *Star*, two weeks old, and printed in English. Chemical handbooks, agricultural pamphlets, a copy of the tariff laws, an abstract of the proceedings of the Canadian Parliament, left him uninterested. At last he found a worm-eaten novel, and, stretching himself on the only sofa in the place, essayed to read. But soon the volume fell from his listless hands; he had thrice seen the drama taken from this ultra-popular romance.

A numbness fell upon his soul—a sort of hopeless numbness, which, like the rains of autumn, promised to last as long as life itself. Not to suffice unto one's self is the Frenchman's national defect. Accustomed from childhood to look without for everything, from his judgments in politics and art to his amusements, he even looks without for fortune itself; since, in France, filial inheritance is the normal, almost compulsory, source of ultimate income. Alain de Lavandien, as a member of Parisian society, was doubly French.

It is easy to imagine that this high-strung crea-

ture was often a prey to quick and cruel reactions. Twelve hours before, astonished himself at his own courage, he was thinking that the men of Navarre, the Moors and the Castillians, were slow in riding up to dispute the possession of his particular Chimène. But a pessimistic conversation, an uncomfortable toilet-chamber, a too untempered bit of sunshine, and, on top of all, a morning without either a ride on horseback, letters, newspapers, complicated with a spell of most unusual self-interviewing, now proved sufficient to envelop past, present, and future in one dreary wet sheet of reflection. Interrogate the fugitives in a battle panic, you will find among the number many thoughtful heroes.

Happily for the heroism of the young viscount, his reflections were interrupted by the arrival of Cléguérac. They dined together gayly. It was a pleasure to watch Maurice eat; not that he ate so very much, but proudly, so to speak, as a man who makes a conquest even of his dinners.

The repast over, instead of taking a nap for half an hour—almost a necessity in the long days of summer—the farmer turned the conversation himself to his guest's affairs:

"If I understood you correctly, you think of settling in my neighborhood. Then you are to return to France for Mademoiselle Montdauphin and bring her over here, having, of course, first made her Viscountess Lavandien. After that you will set to work, as you see me and many others, so that you

may make your fortune, when, with flags flying and fifes piping, you will return to your own world, back to society and your former habits. Am I correct in my suppositions?"

"Not precisely," said Alain, with some hesitation. Our idea is to break down the opposition of my family. I know my parents. If, every day they were to see me pass, denied, chastised, and almost starved by their own judgment, their irritation would feed upon itself. Seeing the eyes of the world upon them, they would make a virtue of inflexibility. They are still young. Heaven knows how long I should have to survive on crusts; for we should get nothing much more sustaining were we to remain in Paris. I applaud a young man who, seeking a position, some day finds a hundred louis — drawn from a friend's pocketbook. But you know how it is. The bachelor who borrows the money is a genuine comrade, often cleverer than yourself. Married, if he risks a similar appeal, he is a beggar pure and simple. And I will not seek to describe the sufferings of a young lady obliged to shun her former friends in order to conceal the fact that she is wearing dresses that they first became acquainted with two years ago. I admit that Simone would not be madly amused with the excitements of prairie-life, but she could not fail to be happier than in Paris with purses like ours."

"It is very possible," said Cléguérac, struck with the feasibility of the argument.

"Now," continued Lavandien, "let us maintain the opposite hypothesis. We disappear. It is vaguely known we are 'in America.' The rumor starts almost of its own accord that we are gathering gold by handfuls. It is easy to waft the rumor Parisward; soon we are taken for potential millionaires. My parents are flattered; tender memories return; and soon their arms are held wide open for the prodigal."

"In fine," said Maurice, with a genial smile, "you are of the opinion that the prodigal son, if he wants the fatted calf killed for him, should have the reputation of being able, at a pinch, to pay the market value of the entire feast, wine, lights and all. I do not say this may not be; but I must not disguise from you the fact that this will not console the calf's mother for its loss. This is what I am anxious about on your behalf, and, above all, on Mademoiselle de Montdauphin's. I wish to think you know your future wife's entire disposition?"

"*Her* disposition! Poor Simone! I had every opportunity of studying it for two entire seasons, during which I saw her five times a week. I am sure we must have waltzed together more than fifty times."

"And—she dances well?"

The words bore less heavily on Mademoiselle de Montdauphin herself than on her maladroit knight-errant. Alain found them not any more to his taste for being uttered with extreme gravity. In

another place he would have consulted his watch and found a convenient appointment to waft him from the side of this unsmiling wit. But necessity made such a move as impossible as it would have been for one of the Siamese twins to have left his brother to his own reflections after a hasty word. He assumed a saddened air, and replied that he was already unhappy enough, and that it was not *his* fault if the world was accustomed to consecrate its evenings to the ballroom rather than to the library.

"When you understand my future wife," he concluded, with a certain cold dignity, "you will see that she knows much more than how to dance—that she has many other merits in addition to her beauty—even the merit of the will to follow me to the ends of the earth. I hope that you will find no need to ask me then *the reason why I love her*."

Cléguérac protested he would not ask another question, not even why this paragon, Simone, had taken it into her head to fall in love with him, Lavandien. To change the conversation, or probably with an even more profound intention, he spoke of the Pauvells and their charming daughter.

"Gladys! She passes for one of the belles of New York," answered Alain. "I dare to tell you she deserves the reputation; for, you will agree with me, it is possible to love a lady all her days without falling into the way of thinking every other woman ugly."

"Of these things I know nothing," said Maurice,

lowering his eyes so as to conceal what might be passing in his mind. "I do not remember that I ever loved a lady all her life."

"Come, come, my clever cousin, I see that you are making merry with me once again. That does not prevent its being true that I spent three weeks at Newport with the Pauvells; that I saw Gladys from morning to night all through those twenty days; that we danced, swam, drove and rode together, played lawn tennis, and chatted in the moonlight, during which conversations she never concealed from me her partiality for titles. Nevertheless, behold me in the desert; but, as you will see, not for lack of means and opportunity to marry Gladys Pauvell."

There was nothing to reply to such an argument, and, besides, Maurice was the first to give others the credit of good intentions. With cordial sincerity he extended his hand and spoke thus in apology:

"One becomes a little rude and rough after a few years in the Great North West. But the juice is sweeter than the rind. If, by good fortune, you should settle in this vicinity, your wife and you will always find in me a genuine friend. Looking forward, we will begin your initiation with a country ride. Put on your very toughest hunting-wear. Let us make ready for the coming strife."

V.

A QUARTER of an hour afterward, master and pupil installed themselves in the buggy, or rather hung suspended in the attitudes of decorative sprites, for the narrow vehicle was already almost filled with farming implements. Happily the farm was not exceedingly extensive. Once more they ascended the microscopic mountain inhabited by the German. Cléguérac informed his companion that the name of the latter was the Baron d'Oberkorn, and that the daughter's was Irene.

"She is now in the veranda!" cried Alain.

"Indeed," said Maurice, shrugging his shoulders, "I think she passes nine-tenths of her life there."

As on the day before, the neighbors saluted with an air of the greatest ceremony, which told of an acquaintance short of intimacy.

"You are hardly on sympathetic terms?" put in the young Parisian.

"Our relations begin and end with salutations, a word or two if passing on the public highway, and to plain figures in the beetroot season. He sells me his entire crop."

"What!" cried the French viscount, "pay a Prussian *money?*"

"Would to heaven we had never paid the Prus-

sian's money on less disadvantageous terms!" exclaimed Cléguérac coolly.

"'Tis hard, nevertheless," cried the young patriot, shaking his head.

"Not much harder than to pay the tariff that board and lodge Wolfe's successors."

"Who was this Wolfe?"

"The English general who deprived us of the possession of Canada."

"Ah! but that was so long ago."

This political conversation was interrupted by the force of circumstances. The buggy came to a full stop before the outer paling of the settlement. Maurice unhitched the mare and girthed her with the Mexican saddle he had brought along with him. When he was in the saddle with his large straw hat garnished with stamped leather band, his tanned leather breeches garnished with ivory buttons, a lasso hanging to the pummel (which rose nearly as high as his breast), nobody would have supposed our cavalier, whose fashion of mounting and riding were equally barbaric, had been at one time the centaur of the military riding-school. He entered the paddock, gazed round for a moment for the mount he was in search of, and suddenly darted off at breakneck speed. Alain, following him with his eyes, murmured slowly:

"Yes, a genuine prairie centaur. But why this utter change of style? It's childish. I shall always adhere to the tenets of the *classic* school."

Classic this Parisian was, undoubtedly. Patent-

leather boots, flat-soled, leggings of mouse-colored chamois leather, pants of dark tweed, bridle-hand like a Rotten Row dandy, all irreproachably correct, save the saddle-cover, which consisted of a huge straw mat imposed by Maurice, instead of the half-moon of black felt a Hickel would have deemed the only thing.

"No stealing away, friend," Maurice had peremptorily commanded.

Lavandien, the correct, agreed. When Maurice said some things in a certain tone, those around him were usually willing to coincide.

The horses, grouped in irregular knots at the limits of the pasturage, began to show signs of agitation. They had ceased to browse, each head was raised, neck stretched, and ear pointed in the direction of their enemy, the boss. These children of the prairie, hardly genuine captives, often but half-broken, knew already that one among them was doomed that day to don the saddle and the bridle, and, after a short struggle in full view of its companions, led away to bear an ignominious load. The problem was, not to become the victim.

Soon the groups, just now compact and sympathetic, became detached and soon flew into divergent atoms before that bent figure, already leaning forward to the lasso. The confusion became so complete, the distance so great, that it was difficult to tell, among the black points scurrying across the field of view, which horse was the cause of the excitement. At last, in a quarter of an hour,

Maurice rejoined his comrade, leading far behind a horse that seemed profoundly "taken down," but, as regarded any new order, showed little desire for immediate obedience.

"Here's your fellow!" cried Maurice, leaping to the ground. "His name is Blackfoot. I hereby make you a present of him. Do not judge him by his present looks. Were he well-fed and groomed for a month or two, you would only have to mount him in the Bois one morning to have three hundred louis in your pocket."

"You have forgotten to shoe him," said Alain, laughing, "and also to have him primarily clipped."

"As for the clipping, I admit he is open to criticism. Nevertheless, as you shall see, the young anarchist will already wear a bridle, and allow a saddle on his back—on condition that there is nobody in it. He and I have often discussed the problem without coming to an understanding. I yield the field to you. Since you love horses, the exercise I am about to set you will at least prove interesting, and even, I am certain, novel."

While speaking thus, Maurice transferred the saddle and bridle from Annie to Blackfoot. The animal observed an obstinate neutrality, something like the attitude of the king of the forest waiting for the cage door to be opened, so that he may spring at large upon the public.

"Now," said the professor, "spring upon your steed without touching the stirrups. Sink instantly into your seat, *and hold on*, no matter how.

Pay attention that this is no duel between civilized foes—that it has no laws or regulations whatsoever. Do not fall off; that is the problem, stripped of all verbal trappings. Only do not tumble, because if you *do* fall off, your new mount will consider himself authorized by your weakness in that fatal moment to resist for another year to come. Bravo, cousin, that magnificent leap does you honor! Now try and stay where you are. No, throw away the whip. Now clutch the pommel. Seize the mane. Thank heaven! he does it. We are brothers. Admirable! Courage! The worst is over. You were born to lead a riding-school."

Lavandien had no leisure to listen further. The animal, hardly feeling the weight of a human being, proceeded to fulminate (the most expressive word that we can find), his fore and rear legs in opposite directions, first having screwed them up into the compass of a circus-hoop. Without apparent anger, with the cool, customary action of the habitual gladiator, these prodigious skyward leaps brought him sooner or later back to earth, only to repeat the operation. Alain, accustomed to the knowing tricks and whims of the unmounted colts of his own country, in vain endeavored to reassume the classic seat in face of these patient, persevering, *unique* tactics of the American buck-jumper. What nerved him most was an odd word that had dropped from Rabat. It was necessary to show the Great North West that he had not "the soldier's sea-sickness!"

"All goes well," cried Maurice. "Come, you are a solid horseman."

"Only too much so," exclaimed the human projectile. "Were I to fall off at least I should be at rest. Is this séance going to last forever? Look around you, cousin. Do you see any of my limbs that may have fallen off?"

Cléguérac informed his friend that an American horse rarely bucks for three hours on end, usually much less; that he stops abruptly as soon as he is thoroughly winded, remaining stupidly inert, and no more budging at the spur than though he were a wooden dummy. On the next day the scene begins anew. And so on for a week or two. Some fine day the animal is forced to admit that human obstinacy o'ercomes its own. Then he gives in remaining gentle, often passing from one extreme to the other, till you have sometimes to urge him on by every feasible method.

Happily a similar strain of exaggeration had never been a part of Blackfoot's character. He hardly bucks for half an hour; twenty minutes, perhaps, would be the limit, after which his new master was able without discomfort to put him through the rudiments of domestic equitation. But, in truth, both man and beast stood in need of some repose. Soon they took leave of one another. Alain landed safely, himself unsaddled and unbridled his fiery steed, picked up the débris of his whip that had been trodden into flinders, gave a look to the irreparable injuries to his costume, and,

somewhat out of breath, resumed his seat in the buggy.

The return to "The Hermitage" was accomplished almost in silence. Alain, sticky with perspiration, half-paralyzed with fatigue, reflected that when he arrived at his destination he would find nothing representing his valet-de-chambre and cosey dressing-room in the Avenue Marceau. He reflected, too, that the metamorphosis of Cléguérac had its own good elements, and that the Mexican saddle, with its straps an inch thick, was not without its advantages. As was only right and proper, he felt the conqueror's legitimate pride; but he had only purchased victory by trampling under foot every principle of elegant and scientific equitation.

Still, when he had taken a bath and changed his clothes, taking his seat at table with his cousin, he experienced the natural good humor of the man who has come through the terrors of a rough and trying day with flying colors.

The conversation turned on Paris, as always happens when a Parisian is in his best spirits. Alain, according to his custom, wished to speak of matters theatrical, but soon perceived that the luckless Cléguérac did not even know the names of the latter-day Molières, Beaumarchais, Talmas, and Sophie Arnoulds, whose genius, beauty, follies, falls, and fits of spleen had occupied the entire attention of the *City of Light* for the last twelve months.

"What the deuce am I to hit on to interest this man?" he thought, discouraged.

For that he had only to speak of his love, and his prospective marriage. But as he had on the previous evening written the Countess Gravino, our lover considered his cousin no more an expert in affairs of the heart than in things theatrical, not to mention the fact that it caused him as much embarrassment to speak about his marriage as an author of a half-finished story, whose denouement is yet in the clouds.

Happily he was one of those who are never short of subjects of conversation, preferring, above all, to talk about themselves. He began to recount his flattering intimacy with a young prince, a friendship prematurely broken by exile. A date came up in course of the recital. Cléguérac affirmed that his friend was mistaken about the day on which occurred the historic incident of "the closure."

"Oh, no," said Alain, "the date is engraved forever on my recollection. The law was passed the same day that brought me one of the greatest joys of my life. But you would hardly believe the poignant emotions I experienced."

Maurice, believing that his interlocutor was referring to the ever-to-be-remembered moment when Simone had made a present of her heart, energetically protested, and would have displayed even greater interest had not the matter seemed a rather delicate one. Perhaps a brilliant sympathetic second volume of romance had been evolved from the first, which had appeared a little dull.

"It was my day for being balloted or blackballed at the club," began the young Parisian, with his eyes fixed on vacancy.

"Aha!" cried Maurice, inclined to laugh now at his own simplicity.

"I must tell you that my father, after voting for me, had not sufficient courage to await the summing-up."

"A father is truly so when he is absent," observed Cléguérac, who had succeeding in resuming his usual air of gravity."

"I will observe that my candidacy was not altogether unsupported. My father, as you may remember even better than myself, was once a very attractive man, and—the great ladies of his period brought their influence to bear."

"Certainly; your father's friends became your own."

"Yes, but their sex prevented them from voting at the same time that their age precluded them from having much influence on the votes of others. Besides, as one of them said to me once: 'For one friend we make a score of enemies. It is like the government and the tobacco agencies.' You thus perceive I had against me all those who——"

"Who did not obtain the tobacco agency held by your father."

"Precisely. Well, that day we were all sitting in our private salon, my father and mother with a few good friends. We pretended to be conversing, but conversation flapped a tired single wing. Ev-

ery moment we were awaiting the grand verdict. That old wretch, Daddy Damblain, came rushing in like a whirlwind, with an air of overwhelmment. 'We are vanquished,' he groaned. Mamma bit her lips; my father fell back on a sofa."

"You are blackballed!"

"We all believed it. One of my cousins said: 'The introducers ought to make a stand.' My mother added: 'This kind of thing means five sepulchral dinner parties in three weeks.' An elderly aunt, a crazy legitimist given to long prayers, raised her eyes to heaven and cried: 'Perhaps we should thank God. The dear young man would have discovered there so many bad examples.' Old Damblain was regarding us all with an air of blank amazement. It was a regular Palais Royal scene. Happily, Jean de Cabenay fell like a fuse into the darkness of this funeral pomp. Brave boy, I see him yet! He embraced us all—even my aunt. M. de Damblain, who could not understand the motive for the newcomer's joy, turns almost apoplectic with curiosity. He is attended to, and immediately we learn that he had come from Parliament and not the club. We had thought but of my affair; he was thinking only of the princes. But, between ourselves, I passed a very villainous half hour, and you may judge whether I have not cause to remember that particular evening.'

"Your hair did not turn white?" said Maurice, without a smile.

"Always the cynic, cousin. Seek only to dis-

cover facts. No, I don't think I ever went through more in my life. As for my father, he was more pleased even than I. I found myself a few hundred louis in debt; I had but to say the word—the dear man found the ready money without a murmur."

"Why, when you were about it, did you not demand permission to marry Mademoiselle Simone?"

"We had not then arrived at the marrying point," said Alain dryly.

This time the viscount was really vexed, with that harsh vexation whose object is one's self. For an hour he had been serving as an object-lesson to this taciturn auditor, who let him talk as he liked, watching his every word. Accustomed to be taken seriously by all with whom he came in contact, aggrandized in his own esteem by self-sacrifice and by a love he deemed sublime, persuaded that he was about to astonish the world by his courage and determination, in eight-and-forty hours he had earned one single item of commendation from Cléguérac—he was an excellent rider. As for the rest, he could not for a moment doubt that his cousin considered him a very ordinary being.

This internal humiliation, for which he felt he could never forgive Maurice, was on the point of leading him to the rupture of sudden departure. But how excuse this new freak to Simone? He was now known at "The Hermitage." His end and aim in coming there were known. He was not slow to perceive that it would be by no means

easy to formulate new plans to carry out so crude a campaign. In his heart he had no other plan. To gain time was his strategy, and he saw things in a less rosy light, now that Cléguérac had put his finger on results without having the appearance of touching them.

He broke up the séance by declaring that his interview with Blackfoot had fatigued him.

"That may well be," exclaimed Maurice. "But we must strike the iron while it is hot, and hold high matinée to-morrow morning, too, returning to the scene of battle. In a few days, if all goes well, you will have a full-blooded, tractable mount; and, in this country, all is done on horseback, or with horses."

It was not long before Alain closed his eyes, comparing the cases of sweetheart and steed with a secret bitterness in the avowal that the conquest of the former was likely to prove even more arduous than a complete victory over the latter.

VI.

As soon as Alain woke up in the morning he perceived with pleasure that it was 8 o'clock already. So much time gained. Rabat and the tray made their appearance; but this time no conversation was indulged in. Rabat was a pessimist, and the young Parisian knew only too well how his own heart was bound up in a brilliant future.

With claiming the old salt's services, he rose, impelled by a secret desire to quit a house in which he was on sympathetic terms neither with man nor master. There was still a streak of morning freshness in the air. Alain crossed the brook, gained the miniature forest, and sat down in the shade to ponder on Simone. Soon he began to realize that while thinking of Simone was a very agreeable occupation, thinking of certain facts in her connection was the reverse. This was enough to terminate his reverie.

Lifting his eyes he saw the Gray House on his right, upon the opposite bank. No other dwelling save "The Hermitage" was to be seen in any direction. And this was the abiding place of Prussians. Why did these obnoxious neighbors belong to the one nationality that must necessarily check friendly

and amusing intercourse? But, anyhow, a house is a house, whatever the tongue its inmates speak; and our Parisian, already overcome with solitude, felt a strange nostalgia in the contemplation of a creature of his own species, a desire to meet a woman face to face, he might at least salute. Besides he experienced the necessity of lending occupation to his mind, his limbs, until the breakfast hour, still so far away!

He stood undecided for five minutes between idleness and want of employment, two sisters who are not always so friendly as we may think. These five minutes over, he quitted the wood, traversed the rustic bridge anew, and directed his footsteps to the toy cottage whose limitations seemed to mesmerize him. Where was he going, this cynical man of society, this exquisite who, in the Bois, would hardly turn his eyes to see an unthroned queen pass by? He is about to prowl about a little hillock to ascertain if a strange village maid is on her usual seat, book in hand, in the vague hope that his footfall on the grass may make her raise her glorious, candid eyes.

At a distance of five hundred paces our amateur loafer thought he discovered that the bench was empty; as he approached nearer a female form left the house in the direction of the veranda. Soon he perceived it was Irene Oberkorn, whose beautiful hair glowed in the sunshine like a cascade of liquid gold. This time, on his side, the viscount had an opportunity to scrutinize the girl, who for

her part, was "taking stock" of him without taking the least pains to mask her curiosity.

"What a magnificent head of hair!" thought Alain. "And that, at least, I may admire without wasting my enthusiasm over the beautifying powers of modern chemicals."

Fraülein von Oberkorn had other admirable points besides her hair. She had a small, well-formed, pensive, un-German mouth, whose lips were often in the habit of standing just enough ajar to show a set of strangely even pearly teeth. Her eyes, a gray sapphire, passed with astonishing rapidity from the dreaminess of reverie to a fixity of regard unusual in blondes. At length the Viscount de Lavandien, who thought himself as fine a judge of women as of horses—in theory, be it understood—gave vent to his decisions in a formula not without significance in a man of his means:

"Were she but properly dressed!"

It did not take him long to frame another aspiration much more feasible: a thread for conversation. Still he hesitated. Not that he was by any means a timid man; he had accosted unknown ladies before successfully in places a thousand times less accommodating; but he remembered to have severely judged Cléguérac's plain, commercial relations with the German colonist.

"Heaven only knows what fun he would make of me, if he only knew I was within gun-shot of the 'Gray House'!"

Involuntarily he turned from one side to another,

to assure himself that Annie and her master were not within sight. What a nuisance this cousin was, and the deuce take men who cannot let the slightest theme escape their caustic wit!

At last he found himself at the foot of the hillock. He bowed; his salute was returned in a manner that a Parisian mother would have deemed too civil. But Paris was far away; and so, still worse, was Simone's mother. The promenader hesitated, assured only by her appearance that this fair dweller in the prairie would herself resolve the mutual hesitation. She placed her book on her knees accordingly, and said, in very correct language, while with a pronounced accent and some delay to look for words:

"I presume you wish to find out where your friend is. You will find him in his factory over yonder."

With a fine but somewhat weather-beaten hand, possibly a little labor-stained, the young girl designated a point in the plain concealed by the miniature mountain.

"Do you think he will soon return?" asked Lavandien, as though it was extremely probable that she would be acquainted with his movements.

She seemed to find the question not unnatural, and answered, drawing out a little gold watch:

"It's 11 o'clock. M. de Cléguérac quits his factory at twelve."

Alain hesitated less and less; was he not out of danger for another hour?

"The sun is alarmingly hot," he declared.

"Would you like to come up and sit in the shade?" asked the mistress of the "Gray House," so simply that it was impossible for the young man's vanity to experience the slightest fillip from the proposition.

Alain did not err, as a rule, on the side of fatuity —which is a rare default to-day among men of his set—not that they have more modesty than formerly, but they are not nearly so simple; for, going to the causes of things, the snob is a noodle who measures his dignity by his own opinions. Two minutes afterward the new friends were seated side by side on the rough deal bench, under the shadow of an ample roof. Irene had placed her book between them, and so arranged her robe as to scant it of no single inch of possible length.

"How do you like our country?" she asked, without any appearance of timidity.

"But it is not *your* country, mademoiselle," Alain returned, to show himself the owner of the conversation key.

"Oh!" said she, "I was twelve when I came with papa to the Great North West. I can hardly imagine the appearance of my birthplace."

"What, you hold your native land in no regret?"

The German girl mentally sought for a few moments what gravity even possible reproach, might lurk in this objection, then answered:

"We were well off over yonder. My father had a lovely place, but they did him some injustice; he

was punished on account of too great political frankness. We lost everything. Mamma died of mortification. So we went away partly because it had become necessary to work, partly not to look upon the land that had slain an innocent woman. How can I, then, regret *my country?*"

"Ah! so they refine on nationality, even in Germany!"

And, as Alain saw by Irene's silence that niceties of French were not at her command, he continued:

"How many years have you inhabited the Gray House?' "

"More than four."

"Which have appeared as many centuries?"

"No. For I have worked hard. My father has but me to keep his house."

"Oh!" said Lavandien, throwing a facile look over the house, which was not hard to comprehend.

"The house is slender; so much the more it occupies my time," answered Mademoiselle d'Oberkorn. "I try to manage so that my father, when he comes from the field, may not too keenly perceive all that we lack."

"Still," finely insinuated Alain, "your occupation leaves you time for reading. You seem to take a delight in this bench."

Irene reddened deeply, which made her interlocutor think she was a very sensitive person.

"Come, come," he went on, in a paternal tone:

"Do not imagine I was accusing you of idleness. At your age it is natural to seek relaxation. What is the name of the book you were reading? May I look at it? What? The French Grammar! What an original idea!"

Irene regarded her bench-fellow sideways, shaking her head to throw aside the cascade of gold that tumbled over her eyes—a little childish trait she had preserved—and answered:

"Do you expect me, at my age, to continue the study of the German Grammar?"

"No," he replied, glad to see his *vis-à-vis* could give a pointed answer. "But may I ask you the name of your French professor?"

"When our misfortunes came upon us, I was under a Parisian governess, and was beginning to speak your language. Here, I was on the point of forgetting all I had learned, but, after the lapse of a few months, I resumed school attendance. I am both the mistress and the pupil."

"You will certainly obtain the first prize!" said Alain, laughing. "Only I fear the French language may never be of much service to you."

A sudden singularly sad expression overclouded Irene's transparent countenance. Once more she shook her blonde head, and asked, rather coldly:

"Do you speak German, monsieur?"

"No," answered Alain, without a word of explanation.

"English?"

"No. The Englishman aggravates me."

"Italian?"

"I despise Italians."

"Then, you have to thank my poor French Grammar. Had I had the pleasure of this visit a year ago, we should hardly have exchanged a dozen words, lacking a mutual tongue."

"Aha, mademoiselle, I see it will be needful to adjudge you two prizes instead of one. In logic you are absolutly invincible."

"Formerly deemed a horrid study. Do you leave again very soon, monsieur?"

Lavandien had risen, his eyes fixed in the direction of the hidden factory. His eyes returned, not without a certain sense of usage already, to Irene, in a way that seemed to sigh, "So soon!" At the end of half an hour he took his leave. He decided in his own mind that he would not try too hard to turn the head of this compound of Gretchen and Amazonian. Still she was amusing—far more so than that factotum tattler at "The Hermitage"—even than his master.

"I will come back again soon, for my presence seems to give you some faint pleasure."

"Oh, so much! I do so love to speak French. This has been a morning worth three weeks of lonely study."

The infant of Nature was slightly indiscreet. To punish her Alain launched this Parthian arrow:

"You never converse with my friend Cléguérac?"

"Because your cousin never comes to see us," answered she with a despondent gesture. "One

would think the human race frightened him. Formerly we used to see him oftener. We never did him any harm. My father esteems him very highly indeed, and tells all who will listen that Monsieur de Cléguérac will, some day, be the Member of Parliament for the district. Poor father! I see how he suffers from the rudeness of an upright man. For your friend is good. In his dealings with us he is even generous. Do you think we ought to invite him, insist on his leaving his solitude? Often have I pressed my father to go to 'The Hermitage'; but he does not like to risk the undertaking. If you could only get to find some clew——"

"Yes, yes, mademoiselle, I will try to find out his reasons," said Alain, trying to escape, for at any moment now Maurice might put in an appearance.

He regained the domicile by a detour, in order to put the enemy off the scent, soliloquizing:

"Baron von Oberkorn ought to teach his daughter a little contemporary history. This child poses one with questions—— All the same, she is quite pretty. But what a dress!"

During these reflections Maurice had come in for his early dinner, as he did every day. Passing the "Gray House" on foot because of the declivity, he saluted the young girl without looking at her; for he was of opinion that one ought not, save under compulsion, to look at things or people who displease or aggravate us.

But his eyes, falling on the dusty path that led

up to the "Gray House," fell on the braided yellow head of one of those inextinguishable pipe-lights experienced smokers use. One does not inhabit the prairie for some years without acquiring a certain amount of that sagacity and acumen in physical signs for which the Indian is so remarkable. Now, Maurice knew for a fact that nobody who lived within twenty miles carried such fusees.

"Poor cousin," he thought, smiling. "How he is dying of lassitude! I leave him quite too much alone."

All the same he perceived, on rejoining Alain, that the young viscount counted on preserving the mystery of his promenade. There was no longer any talk of Blackfoot, and the achievement of further mastery over that very restive animal. To all appearance, this new enterprise had more interest for the Parisian than farming and agriculture, beetroot-sugar and molasses. To excuse his own preoccupation, Alain said:

"As I shall be afoot, I cannot follow you. Allow me first to make a roadster of yonder ferocious animal, and then you shall begin to teach me farming."

But when Blackfoot had capitulated, which, to render justice to his conqueror, came about sooner than any one could have anticipated, the first favor Alain solicited of his cousin was to accompany him to Wabigoon. And then he could expedite his letters. The post-office, in return, overwhelmed him with an avalanche of letters and journals the young

marquis demolished at his leisure on the ensuing morning. The afternoon was occupied in answering his correspondents. The next day Alain again visited Wabigoon, this time alone. At supper-time his cousin hardly knew him, so joyful seemed the exile at having replaced the thread that bound him to the world. Waistcoat unbuttoned, cravat flying loose, hat on the back of his head, he assumed the elmentary outward acts and bearing of the genuine cowboy. For a trifle he would have put his feet upon the table; he perceived that Cléguérac was noticing his actions. When it was time to go to bed, Alain exclaimed:

"Look here, my dear fellow (lighting a pipe purchased a few hours previously as being characteristic of the country), I do not wish to sneer at agricultural pursuits, but, for me, the future of the Great North West is in horse-breeding. My path is chosen. I will be a breeder. Simone doats on horses."

"*Apropos*, have you good news of Mademoiselle Montdauphin?"

"The best of news," cried Alain, hardly having understood the question.

VII.

FROM that day the young cousins lived like a married couple *à la mode*, seeing each other rarely except at meal-times. Cléguérac, overdone with work in the supervision of the farm, did not complain of the greater liberty thus left him. Alain had asked and obtained the post of director-general of the equine department—a position which, save in the case of the breaking out of bounds of the boarders, might pass for honorary employment. None the less had he written home that he was in charge, all alone, of caring for, feeding, guarding, and perpetuating a family of one hundred horses, and thus accounting for the falling off in number and in size of his letters. If we must confess it, his Parisian correspondence, that is, his correspondence with the Paris of the Countess de Gravino and Simone caused him some embarrassment. To have to repeat to one's betrothed, in satisfactory words, that one is dying with impatience to marry, but hasn't the least idea when or where that marriage may take place, is but a thankless task. But to prove serious love, actions speak louder than words. Simone was greatly moved when she reflected what superhuman work her lover had undertaken for her sake.

Thanks to the happiness she experienced in feel-

ing herself so well loved, thanks also to an invitation she and her mother received to spend a few weeks in the Countess de Gravino's country house, always full of charming society, the end of summer and commencement of autumn passed pleasantly enough. The countess sang the praises of "The Hermitage" and Maurice more than once or twice.

As for young Alain, Heaven shield us from saying that he thought less and less of his lady-love; but it is certain that at this time he seemed to share his family's procrastinating ways. Without boasting, we may say that he is becoming as good a judge of horses as his cousin. He rides into Wabigoon now, as formerly across the Bois, without, however, meeting so many people he knows upon the way.

That town in embryo—and planks—amused him. He had found there one of those universal shops, which, under the name of stores, furnish Canadian colonists, according to their wants, with clothes or drugs, pianos or plates, corsets or cooking-stoves. The owner, one of the personages of Wabigoon, got on the sunny side of the young man less by speaking to him in broken French than instilling into Lavandien's head the idea that he was learning English.

"Such a store would make its fortune in Paris," said the latter one day to Maurice. "The man keeps English cloths my tailor never has been able to match. The deuce, he is choked on both sides by those beggarly Germans!"

Cléguérac had a fancy to tell him that he had that very morning found a yellow fusee on the rather Germanic entrance to the "Gray House." But he had resolved to begin to seriously study his friend's character—a medley of good qualities and childish weaknesses.

"When we are the masters of the country, we will open Assiniboine to French imports," said he. "Till then let us bow the head."

Nevertheless Alain became quite popular in Wabigoon. The proprietor of the store had obtained his partial confidence one day, without warning him that he was worming *an interview* out of him; for the jam-merchant was at the same time proprietor and manager of the Assiniboine *Star*. For the first time in his life Alain knew the joy of seeing his name in capitals at the head of a newspaper column. Receiving it at "The Hermitage," he placed one copy out of two purchased in Maurice's hands. We may guess for whom the other was destined, be it understood, in a sealed envelope. We shall see that the latter precaution was insufficient.

The interview, which Cléguérac read out loud in French, would not have given the father the same pleasure it gave the son, gently mouthed by the partial reader. The Wabigoon journal recounted the arrival of the Viscount de Lavandien on the banks of Moose Brook, "where he is going to set us all a new example of the courage and taste for colonial enterprise that distinguish the coming

French race." Already, said the *Star*, the newcomer has associated himself with one of his old friends in the management of "The Hermitage." At the same time, this was but the lifting of the curtain. The viscount's intention in coming over was to marry and purchase a magnificent domain, without being able to say exactly whether it was with a domain or a farm he wished to start. But after a few details thrown in by the reporter on the physical and moral qualifications and financial resources of the future hero, it was hinted that neither one nor the other of his enterprises would hang fire long.

Cléguérac translated the article without the least bitterness, although his own name was not even mentioned. Alain, showing his own satisfaction, had the good taste to show regret for this omission.

"The matter surprises me less than yourself," his cousin answered. "I must take into consideration the fact that I once drew editorial blood through the nose, outside the Wabigoon Club, in the days when men had not yet left off fighting me. Yonder brave man is as tough as cartilage."

Cléguérac remained no less unmoved when one fine day Alain appeared before him in a veritable cowboy's outfit; Mexican saddle, plaited lasso, leather pantaloons, huge straw hat, and bowie knife at belt. The proprietor of the store handled the camera in his spare moments, and had taken some photographs of the viscount in his novel get-up which suited him admirably. Simone, when, by a

roundabout journey she should receive the picture and newspaper article, would experience delight attempered with a little sadness. She was gayly amusing herself at the countess' house, having just taken the leading rôle in a drawing-room comedy; the house was full of pleasant and attentive visitors.

"My next autumn will be a slightly different 'season' from this," said Simone with a brave and graceful little smile.

"Marry, marry always," said the lovely Mathilde. "If I had sought to split my head by deciphering the mysteries of the future! But what a pity your husband, while sending his own photograph, did not send his friend's."

All this time the nights were lengthening at "The Hermitage," and the first white swirls of snow betrayed the northern latitude. For Maurice it was the striking hour, the solemn time of gathering in the beet-root crop. Already the factory chimney vomited swart smoke by night and day. For weeks to come the boiling-pans, the simmering-pans, the vacuum-pans would be in full play.

The sugar factory had interested Lavandien during just one hour, but such scorching and monotonous manipulation fatigued him at the start. So his fortune and imagination were not there. Everybody to his business—his was that of horse-breeding. Unfortunately the paddock did not give him a great deal of occupation. In his equine republic the duty of the president was simply to see the citizens browse from morn to noon, and noon

to night. Happy republic! And Alain, in order to behold his horses feeding, had need of a pair of spurs. As soon as he came within five hundred yards or so the usual stampede began. Let it be confessed that Blackfoot, nobly trained and admirably behaved, was his master's glory and his consolation.

But in time a Parisian gets tired of laying down the law in the desert and of prairie equitation. Wabigoon at length grew tedious. Irene von Oberkorn, when Alain, overcome with tedium, took his usual seat beside her, could talk of nobody but Maurice. And Maurice, when by chance his cousin broached their pretty neighbor's name, had a way of silently pulling his mustache that might cause one to think him better informed than he chose to appear. To tell the solemn truth, the poor viscount was becoming bored to the verge of insanity.

Nevertheless, the many labors of the owner of "The Hermitage" had not prevented him from doing all his duty as a host. Alain had gone a-hunting once or twice with little sport or profit. He had accompanied Cléguérac to the houses of neighbors who lived twelve and fifteen miles away, who, with their wives and daughters, spoke English at him for two hours at a time, until he felt that he should like to beat them. Then the two friends went on a visit to the Indian Reservation. Every one of the entertaining features of the country had been done to death—the cold season was well upon them. The question of marriage, alas! had been

shelved for the time. What was there now to do? How pass the frozen days? How beat an honorable retreat?

But Alain conducted his campaign on two sound mottoes. The first was: to gain time. The second: to seize unexpected advantages. This latter maxim, so often justified in practice, was going to be proved once more, and that right soon. Alain's hesitation was soon to be a thing of the past. This is how the unexpected made its bow:

Wabigoon was all agog. It was the day of the grand political banquet organized by twelve or twenty farmers of the district. Alain was an invited guest, so much may be supposed, although his ideas upon the inner working of prairie politics were in a glorious muddle.

"Be ready for a toast in your honor, and reply to it," warned Maurice.

"In French?"

"The deuce! no one is bound to do impossibilities. I will translate your answer for them."

The town was full of animation, for, as the banquet was accompanied by a ball, lady farmers and their fascinating daughters, blooming with health rather than glowing in silk attire, had accompanied their fathers, husbands, sweethearts into town. Waiting for the hour of the roast ham and beef, and speechifying, they were crowding in and round the stores. The men were buying whittling-knives or daily papers. The youths wore paper collars over flannel shirts. Substantial housewives were renewing

their supplies of candies and peanuts. A few country dudes had purchased dogskin gloves. Pell-mell among the ladies, a couple of Indians, who looked extremely unhappy in their short European frocks and savage continuations, waited patiently to be served with a few ounces of tobacco, without altogether losing sight of their hardy little horses dozing outside, tied to the roof-posts by their scarlet bridle-straps.

The two hotels of Wabigoon, light and primitive structures, whose chambers were separated from each other by walls of stout brown paper, had their share in the honor and glory and profit of the day; the ball had fallen to the lot of one, the banquet to the other. Maurice and his guest had just descended at the latter, ringed in already by a throng of anxious citizens, their vehicles making an imposing show. Irene von Oberkorn was leaning on the balustrade of the veranda, awaiting the advent of the cousins, with the same mild and patient gaze she was wont to wear at the "Gray House." Apparently the store had no attractions for her, or, which was, alas! more probable, her slender purse did not warrant her in braving its seductions. Always the same antique robe, save that to-day a sash of white muslin marred the pretty wave-lines of her figure. Atrocious gloves that had one day been *glacé*, their fingers shrunk with age, hid her well-formed hands, that were a mile too small for them.

Ah! a rose is blossoming at her throat, the only

rose of autumn that stern frost had spared. But youth and pleasure hung twin roses in her cheeks, as she replied to their gay salutations.

While Maurice was hitching his horse, Alain could not refuse the opportunity of talking with Irene, who was making signals to him as to an old friend.

"This little German girl hesitates at nothing," said the viscount to his friend by way of an excuse.

Cléguérac, without seeking to hide a slight shoulder-shrug, retorted:

"Do not act the boy."

Irene stretched her hand to the marquis, who was obliged to take it.

"How late you are," she said.

"Is it not rather you who are early? What are you going to do with yourself till the dancing commences?"

"I dine with Minnie."

"Who is Miss Minnie?"

"The pastor's daughter; we love each other very dearly. Let me present you. It is said she dances very well indeed. As for me, I am not so clever; it is my first ball. But, all the same, you will teach me to dance, won't you?"

"Ah!" said Alain without a direct answer, "this is your first bow to society?"

"I was sixteen years old this morning. Would you not think they were giving the ball expressly in my honor? My heart is leaping with pleasure in my breast."

The exaggeration of this sentiment was not the Parisian's fault. He was not talking to Simone. Nevertheless he regarded this descendant of a noble race almost with emotion, this poor girl denied every worldly advantage, whose youth and beauty were eternally buried, probably, in the silent prairie, now chanting her artless enjoyment like the untaught, melodious chaffinch.

"When we are neighbors, Simone will know how to remake her a good old dress or two without hurting her feelings."

Cléguérac had disappeared to deliver his horse to the safe-keeping of the stable-boy. For the first time since the beginning of the conversation, Irene turned her eyes on Alain otherwise than at insensible intervals.

"Here I am sure of at least *one* partner," said she. "But I should like to know if Monsieur—if Monsieur de Cléguérac—— Do you think he would invite me *too?*"

Cléguérac dance with a German—"a little circus apprentice!"

Alain, pushed forward by chivalric principles, wished to save Irene from self-deception if possible.

"I don't know very much about it," he answered, making a wry face.

Suddenly she became as gloomy as she had hitherto been joyous. The bird no longer even twittered. Ah, this unfortunate Parisian observer!

"He has been speaking of me?" she asked, great-

ly discouraged. "Heavens, could I but tell what he thinks of me!"

"He thinks—he thinks you are a child."

"I am as big as *you* are," said Irene von Oberkorn, drawing herself up.

She was right. But it is a great mistake for a woman to try and prove herself in the right by showing she is taller than her interlocutor. In such cases, on the contrary, the clever ones lie low. But imagine trying to make Irene into a blue-stocking!

Suddenly the viscount felt in an easier frame of mind to administer to this strange girl a few drops of the vinegar of truth.

"You have a woman's height and figure," lowering his eyes severely to the ground, "but it cannot be said that you are altogether in costume."

The bright blue eyes grew dull, then veiled, then full to overflowing. Two full round tears forced themselves through the golden lids. Alain's honor was more than satisfied. As, after all, our valiant youth had old and honorable blood in his veins, he was ashamed to have shown such a heavy hand, and now cast about for the best way of alleviating the distress that he had caused.

"Forgive me!" he cried. "On my cousin's part I hereby invite you to the first dance. Are you still vexed with me?"

Perhaps Irene Oberkorn was about to reply proudly that she did not pick up her cavaliers *per procurationem*. But Maurice's voice was now

heard calling his companion. Both hastened to take their places at the political banquet, while poor Irene remained seated in solitary state, turning her mother's little gold watch, her only trinket, her sole fortune, sadly in her hands.

The tables groaned beneath a mass of solid food more imposing for weight than variety, colossal in dimensions. Two huge hams, two gigantic turkeys, two enormous joints of roast beef, loomed up, so many kitchen phenomena. Lavandien congratulated the poor of the parish, in an aside, for an aftermath of butcher-meat that would feed them for days. But as soon as the company had sung "God save the Queen," all in chorus, and the president had cut up one of these mountains of meat, an operation that was continuous till the beginning of the speech-making, twenty-four pairs of jaws went to work in such an appalling silence, unbroken save as the champing of many bits, that the platefuls began to vanish like a midsummer fog at sunrise. The viscount said to Cléguérac:

"I hope, for the benefit of these poor fellows, that there will be a second course."

"No," retorted Maurice, "you know a politician always quits *with an appetite for more*."

Nevertheless the séance seemed to Lavandien a little long. His cousin, seated on his right, talked custom-house tariffs with the candidate at the next provincial election. To the left Alain perceived the old colonel, Chief of the Reserves, who spoke two languages only, both equally unknown to the

Parisian; one of the Indian tongue, and English. Better to explain the matter, we may say the veteran spoke neither, for he sat carelessly absorbing monuments of meat, washed down by countless cups of *cafés-au-lait*. A phrase from his direction would have proved no less startling than a vocal reply from Cléguérac's beetroot-crushing machine.

Happily for Alain, he was somewhat amused by several bouts of conversation from the lips of a gentleman neither old nor young, who would come, ever and anon, to repose his meagre person on the bench, on the space between the colonel and Lavandien. This personage, to give him his exact due, was no more nor less than a waiter; but service, reduced to its first principles in this establishment, gave him a certain leisure. By this he profited for many consecutive minutes, flitting hither and thither, now swallowing a mouthful of coffee, now tearing between his fingers at a bit of turkey, and, which seemed to give him more pleasure than all, conversing with Lavandien. He spoke almost all European languages, gave himself out as a Hungarian, and recounted how, arriving one morning at Wabigoon to make his fortune, he made his début in the hotel to which his only recommendation was his *manners*. This kind of "character" would have caused a little hesitation in most places, but it was otherwise in a hotel upon the prairie. Alain asked himself what this very comet-like person could have originally been: an assassin in search of a less dangerous business to life and

limb, or an honest inventor victimized by fate, even in his physiognomy, at whose approach one felt that silver should be put away and gold entombed. He was drawn away from the contemplation of this problem by the very first toast. The Hungarian had just placed upon the table, by special authority of the lieutenant-governor, a number of whiskey bottles, rigorously "counted out" as "one among two people." Lavandien, for two months deprived of the taste of alcoholic liquor, foolishly tossed off a goblet of the potent fluid, but had no wish to continue. But the colonel had, and theirs was about the first flask to stand empty. Yet one could see that the more intoxicated of these very ill-matched boon-companions was not the colonel.

From that moment the old officer talked as much as he had a mind to, even more than Alain wanted, for he, too, was in the state that asks a confidential listener. Everything causes us to imagine that he now poured into the old man's senseless ears secrets he should have carried with him to the grave. But as what they said one to another was equal gibberish to each, one must wink at a moment of weakness that broke no man or woman's reputation. Never did one behold two conversationalists more enchanted with each other, for they did not perceive the fundamental impossibility of a misunderstanding.

Suddenly Cléguérac pressed his cousin's elbow. "Attention! they are about to drink your health."

At the same time, with a hand of iron, he fast-

ened his friend to his seat, for the toastee must remain seated while the toasters, on foot, proclaim him "a jolly good fellow," to the tune of *Tra, la, la, la, la, la.*

When the air had ceased, Maurice loosened hold of Lavandien, who shot up like a spring, in answer to the toast.

He began correctly by the expression of his gratitude, and the pleasant reception he had met with in this truly hospitable country. But soon the young orator left far behind the limits he had set himself in the cooler atmosphere of the study. His improvisation broadened out, scintillating as he proceeded. He painted in doleful colors the dull lot of the unfortunate people doomed to live on the exhausted soil and in the corrupt civilization of the ancient world. As for him, the Great North West, which he was beginning to love like a second mother, would evermore count him within the fold of her citizens. It was there he prayed to pass his existence, there he wished to die, after having grafted a number of Lavandien slips, regenerated Lavandiens, to perpetuate the old name

Nobody could have said what Mademoiselle de Montdauphin would have thought of this extraordinary peroration, but, luckily, she was not there to appreciate it. Those who heard the speech in its entirety—for Cléguérac, in his translation, took no pains to soften it down—showed immense enthusiasm; above all, such as had a daughter on the marriage-market, or a farm to sell. Three solid rounds

of shouts and applause caused the window-glass and rafters to ring again, and three or four matrons who had glided into the hall to hear their husbands speak retired crushed, in order to inform the young ladies of their acquaintance that it was essential that evening not only to dance but absolutely to sparkle.

Alas! at this instant the unexpected swooped down on the procedings in the form of a telegraph boy. Alain felt they were slipping a yellow envelope into his hands. Mechanically he opened it, unfolded the dispatch, threw his eyes over it, and then, handing it to Cléguérac, said:

"I don't understand a word of English. Can you decipher the signature?"

"My friend, it is not English," said Maurice. "As for the signature, it is extremely legible: *Lavandien.*"

Alain bounded a foot into the air and came back to the earth as sober a man as there was in the room. After reading it he handed the telegram to Cléguérac. His hands trembled; a cold sweat, the reaction of surprise, stood on his forehead; groans issued from his lips, and, after groans, a brace or two of very palpable oaths.

"Good. That is it, then!" answered Maurice, after having perused the two lines. "Courage! Your ships are burned behind you; one will swim the better! You see, you have all the world before you. To-morrow 'twill be daylight. Come and dance!"

The viscount looked hard at his cousin in order to see whether the latter were not now intoxicated.

"Dance!" said he. "The devil take me if I have heart for dancing. For the love of heaven, take me back to 'The Hermitage,' my dear Maurice. And let the traitor have a care, as soon as I get to know his name."

VIII.

THERE is no item of our daily lives that shall not be known.

One cannot too often read this maxim over to people of small discretion, chiefly wives who wish to deceive their husbands, or, as everybody knows is much more difficult, husbands seeking to betray their wives. The Viscount de Lavandien only wished to deceive his father, and, as he deceived him from afar off, our wilful youth thought he had no exposure to dread.

He imagined, moreover, with some show of sense, that his affair with Simone was hardly known to a dozen intimates, himself included. Now it was currently spoken of in the Countess de Gravino's salons, in those of Père Lavandien, and half a dozen others. At the club people were willing to bet against the marriage, but there were no backers. The Count de Lavandien, however, apparently took but little heed when they told him of his silly son's caprice, which caused him to have it dinned into his ears every night by a group of men arrived at the mature age when disagreeable items of news have all the spice.

This sympathetic group was dispersed about the smoking-room, the day before the Wabigoon banquet. Considering the season, there were not many

present. Père Alain entered, and one of his colleagues, a collector of scandal, asked him what was going to become of his precious offspring.

"My son? He is touring through the United States. He is amusing himself; he rides on horseback with the daughters of millionaires. Travel is the very making of youth."

"They say he leaves a charming *fiancée* behind him."

"Oh! a *fiancée*, simply an idyl, a sketch of an idyl, as says Lhérétier. Our young cavalier had it in his head to carry off a certain lady fair, one evening after a ball. A very charming girl, but without a sou to her name. I had the ill taste to break out laughing in his face, which plunged him in a savage fit of indignation. Seeing him ready to do foolish things, I said: Listen to the choice I give you. Pack your valise immediately for New York, with all due scope and accommodation, or go into the country, without a horse to your name. To Tattersall's with your stable—two-sou cigars to smoke. Do your hunting with a spaniel, unless you prefer fishing."

"And the young man chose the valise?"

"Yes, with the accompanying accommodation. He told me he yielded to force, but that he would love the damsel all his life, and that he would survive the last of his race. 'Will you lay a wager on it?' said I. These ragamuffins think they are finished cavaliers at twenty-three."

"Your wife should mourn her first-born."

"Only with one eye. Her desire is just as great as mine to have grandchildren in the consulates or the prefectures. But I know my man. We shall see him again—and soon."

"You don't read the newspapers very much, do you, Lavandien?" said a member of the club who had entered in time to catch the last phrase.

At the same time the old bore handed the count a scarce dry journal, where Alain's father had the satisfaction of reading the article from the Assiniboine *Star*, well and duly translated, and now published under the title: "The Gentlemen of France in the Great North West."

The blow was a serious one; none the less for being received in public. M. de Lavandien swore and pounded the sofa with his fist, while his comforters pounded him with admirable advice. One recommended that he should give his plain and plump consent to the marriage with Mademoiselle Montdauphin. Another, who had brought an atlas from the library, looked up Wabigoon and mapped out a plan of campaign.

"You are too kind, too kind," growled the new Géronte. "Were you in *my* place would you make the voyage?"

A third was in favor of the intercession or intervention of the colonial minister. But was a colony in question? What was meant by the *Great North West?* Nobody at the club could solve the riddle. Wabigoon obstinately remained invisible upon the map.

"Where in the dickens did the monkey find the money to buy a farm?" groaned the father, wildly clutching his hair. "And may the devil take me if I should have thought that empty-headed chit capable of going into exile for such an imbecile as my son."

"In your place," said somebody, "I should seek information at the newspaper office."

This time the advice was, by unanimous consent, deemed fit and proper. The Count de Lavandien seized his hat and jumped into a vehicle, accompanied by two friends who had nothing else to do. At the newspaper office they found only the usual boy, who, smelling a duel or a beating for somebody, during the course of the evening, informed his master that a suspicious visitor would be there upon the morrow, and recommending certain precautions to be taken.

M. de Lavandien regained his domicile in a deplorable state. Happily the countess, a woman of intellect, put her hand on the key of the situation, and, losing no time in groans, sat down at a table and wrote a careful cablegram, of such virility as to sober up instantly a young man six thousand miles away—as we have seen. One may ask one's self if the application were not as powerful in its way as the colonel's whiskey. Such is the power of words and the right knowledge of their use.

All the same, the dispatch was not sent off that evening. At the telegraph-office they would not accept it, owing to its being insufficiently ad-

dressed. In what part of North America was Wabigoon?

"Try and be good for something," said the countess to her husband, "and to-morrow morning learn the locality of this city with the barbarous name. By that time I shall have ascertained the thoughts of Mamma Montdauphin. I have my own police."

The poor count, who hated going out before the middle of the day, at 9 o'clock found himself in the newspaper office, with the article he had by heart, having read and reperused it almost all night long. After being kept waiting two hours, he saw the arrival of a secretary, who, disavowing all responsibility, took refuge behind a Canadian journal from which he was copying a demi-page.

"Well, then," asked the unfortunate father, "it seems I must seek explanations at Quebec?"

"Hardly so far," responded his interlocutor, with a smile. "The Canadian journal from which we reproduced the article is printed at the Batignolles."

Indeed, M. de Lavandien discovered the "organ" in question in a court leading out of the Rue des Dames. There all was confusion worse confounded. Whether he explained himself confusedly or the Canadian employee—who had a Bordeaux accent—lacked intelligence, the interview was carried under a false flag. The young man thought his visitor wanted himself to buy a farm in the Great North West.

"It is the finest country in the world for a serious

colonist," protested the agent. "It remains to decide what line you mean to take up, wheat culture, the lumber business, cattle or horse raising. Do not forget, too, that there are valuable mines."

At the same time he put under the old gentleman's nose a map embracing a surface equal to nearly half Europe. The map was studded with little squares that gave it the look of coarse canvas. Each little square represented a "township" of sixty square miles.

"How many lots does M. le Comte wish to buy?"

Imagine Molière's Tomé employing his eloquence in trying to sell a galley to old Géronte, after the latter's celebrated scene with Scapin.

It was only by a narrow chance that Géronte did did not strangle the secretary, but he finished up by listening. One might go back from the Parisian journal to its Canadian brother of the Batignolles, from that to a Montreal paper, from Montreal to Winnipeg, from Winnipeg to Wabigoon. The position of Wabigoon was ascertained, also that it possessed telegraphic accommodation. But the Gascon observed that the radius of the office might extend many miles in certain directions, which would render the further dispatch of the telegram somewhat problematical.

Nevertheless, as soon as madame had received the count's report, she expedited the unhappy dispatch whose arrival the reader has already witnessed, which was couched in these terms, all the more terrible for their startling brevity:

"Allowance suppressed. All pecuniary engagements disavowed. Measures being devised for your disinheritance. LAVANDIEN."

Rarely had the marvellous powers of electricity received more startling demonstration. Some hours after the receipt of these lines at the wicket in the Avenue Marceau, the pale reflection of a crescent moon guided the rapid progress of a buggy across the prairie. Maurice with one hand lightly guided the buggy, while the other arm was thrown round his friend's shoulders to preserve the unhappy man from falling, thus led terribly by the flowery path of hope to the verge of ruin. The journey was accomplished without a word on either side, without other incident than Annie's escapades, who would sometimes put one foot in a gopher-hole. Alain felt the refreshing air of night. Hardly had he strength enough to grasp his friend's hand and murmur in a muffled voice:

"To-morrow we will talk, unless I am happy enough never to wake again."

"Poor Simone," sighed Maurice, as he went to bed.

During all that time, at the Wabigoon ball, the young colonists in their shirt-sleeves, with their lady friends in prints and satinettes, gave themselves up to joy. Only a certain blonde Gretchen, who had refused every invitation, remained in her chair, her great blue eyes fixed on the door by which *he* was to enter.

"One would say you were shivering," asked her father, helping her to descend from their vehicle in front of the "Gray House."

"It is nothing," answered she. "On the prairie the dawn is always chilly."

Irene, before entering their humble lodge, gazed at the promise of the day already pink.

"Luck to you," sighed she, "dawn of my seventeenth year."

The morning advanced, and our lightning-struck hero woke from his nightmare-haunted sleep.

"What are you doing there?" grumbled he, as Rabat, planted in the doorway, stood staring at the awakened sleeper.

For all answer the old sailor pointed to the untouched breakfast-tray. But little did Lavandien think of breakfasting. Like all weak spirits, he wrestled painfully to discover the secondary cause of the catastrophe, in preference to trying to overcome its dread effects.

He had thought but for one thing: to unmask the traitor who had told the count of his son's visit to "The Hermitage." Fixed in his seat, with the dread aspect of a judge about to sentence a man to be hanged, he cried:

"Listen to me and answer, if you can, without a lie. To whom did you write to betray my presence in this infernal country?"

Rabat clapped his cap upon his head as though he had been shot. He seemed frozen with terror and stammered:

"What does monsieur say?"

"I wish to say that all the world ought to believe I am in New York; and now my father hears that I am at 'The Hermitage.' That's what I want to say. I know the spy who has undone me. Answer me one word, and I will denounce thee to Zelie!"

"Monsieur," said Rabat, who was as pale as new linen, "on a sailor's word of honor, I don't know how to write. But what reason had monsieur to think——"

"No questions. Pack my trunks. I leave to-night."

"Ah, monsieur!" said the sailor, gaining the doorway, "there will be two to go. That which has happened to one may happen to another. Yes, sir, there *are* spies, and not far off either. I always said there were. German dogs!"

Maurice entered from his work sooner than usual, and went in to his cousin, whom he found with only one shoe on, plunged in reflection.

"Look here," said he, taking a seat, "it is no time to lose your head. I have been thinking over your affairs all the morning. First of all, one question. You are determined, still, to marry Mademoiselle Montdauphin?"

The young viscount forgot his miserable estate in an outbreak of wounded pride.

"The question amounts to this: A man pledges his word. Do you, or do you not, expect him to perform it?"

"My dear cousin," answered Maurice, "there are some words we must *not* speak. If, in a moment of excitement, you had sworn to kill me, I should not hesitate to advise you to perjure yourself."

"It was not to kill her I promised Simone!"

"Ah, my friend, in the days when I inhabited the great world, I assisted at a good many fine marriages that were no better than assassinations."

"As for me, to listen to you one would think it was a question of an ordinary marriage for me. I love Mademoiselle de Montdauphin seriously, sincerely, for my whole life. I could never be happy without her."

"This is a great deal. All the same, it is even more necessary to be assured beforehand that you would be happy *with* her, and—allow me to add this little phrase—that she would be happy with you."

Alain only answered with an angry look.

"Well," returned Cléguérac, "let us say no more. Pass we to ways and means. As I told you last night, your vessels are burned behind you; and here are you and your wife, condemned, willy-nilly, to a prairie life. Let us scan the schedule of acounts. Assets, nil, naturally. Prospects——"

"I only regret one thing," with an accent of conviction not yet shown, "not having debts amounting to five hundred thousand francs. My father would have had the pleasure of paying them! But I don't owe a cent. We go to the same tailor and shirtmaker, and he sends in only one bill."

"Excellent system. You will regret it elsewhere but here. But, so far as I can see, your cargo of effects will last you ten years. Therefore, so far as you are concerned, Dr. — Cr. = o. It is not enough to establish one's self on; but with ten thousand francs you could buy a thousand acres of land, and, however small the dowry the lady would bring, it would, no doubt, suffice. Only the dowry would come after the marriage, the marriage only after the usual formalities, which, in your case, could not now be gone through before you are twenty-five years of age."

Lavandien at these words broke out:

"*Diantre!* cousin, the 'usual formalities'! This is the tenth time you have spoken of the matter as a thing of naught. She is lovely—and I love her. Stay, do you know Prévanes, that poor devil, to-day a consul in China? Well, he was married, after waiting, and—the usual formalities. Complete mess of it, naturally. Do you know what happened next? In less than two years his father died."

"Of chagrin?"

"No; in a railway accident. And afterward it was found that the elder Prévanes had just had time to will away his fortune, leaving the young housekeeper a few well-chosen maxims, and the castle of the same name, carefully stripped bare of every single acre that surrounded it. Do you understand such legislation? The law gives me the right to marry without my father's consent. But

it gives my father the right to watch me die of hunger, unless I marry *with* it. Is not this monstrous?"

Maurice's speaking physiognomy was a study. In one moment it passed from friendly preoccupation to surprise, from surprise to discouragement, from discouragement to consternation. Alain did not notice the changes his recital had wrought. He continued, wrapt up in his subject:

"You see, when one has said 'usual formalities,' all has not been said."

"No," agreed Maurice, pulling out his watch, "but I should like to know what has become of Monsieur Rabat. Are you not dying of hunger?"

At the same time he gave a formidable bang on the boarding, for he felt the necessity of beating something or somebody. The sailor appeared, and finding his master, as he called it, in an evil fettle, gave as an excuse for delaying the dinner that he had been engagd with M. de Lavandien's baggage.

Once more alone with his cousin Maurice asked:

"You are going?"

Alain murmured something, finishing by the avowal that he did not think it wise to infuriate his father."

"By the devil and his horns!" cried Cléguérac, "I think you might have told me this before. For the last hour I have been manœuvring to get into a position to offer you the price of an estate!"

"You, too, against me!" sighed the viscount. "Ah! I have never had a chance!"

In fact he seemed in despair, so much so as to show overflowing eyes, for he wept with some facility. That was one of his peculiarities that had led Simone off her feet, incapable, as many women are, of beholding a man cry without their heart being troubled. Respecting his grief, Maurice began softly:

"I do not wish to contradict you, but it seems to me the real person who 'has no chance' is Mademoiselle Simone."

The young viscount began to sob. To give him time to recover, his cousin continued:

"On the contrary, that which causes the present trouble is having too many chances. In the first place you are the son of a rich father. Then you were born in the happy land where the father is held bound, by custom, to make his son a wealthy man, allowing always that the son's an upright fellow. Your father has no right to impoverish you, whether for his own amusement, or in cross-speculations, or by building a hospital, or by giving you more brothers and sisters than is suitable, after the age when such extravagances are tolerated. Up till now, all, you observe, is well. But when the same father, with inexorable logic, is unwilling to see *you* impoverish yourself by wedding a young lady without fortune, you cry out at the top of your voice. Look you, my dear fellow, you are hardly fair. Do you know what people would say of your father if he allowed you to make a love-match? They would say he was a fool. In such a case I have

seen some creep round to the common-sense opinion of the father. Well, at the banquet yesterday evening you made an impassioned eulogy in favor of numerous posterity."

The viscount wept no more. A sharp sting of ridicule was poisoning the bruise of his chagrin. Seeking an answer, breakfast was announced, interrupting the conversation and bringing it back to more ordinary channels while the sailor was within earshot. But as soon as they were disembarrassed of his presence, Alain took up the order of the day.

"What an upset all this is for you! Thanks to me, you will be up half the night."

"It is not your fault there is only one train for New York every twenty-four hours. Naturally you return to New York?"

"It seems my destiny. From there I cable to my father, supplementing my cable to him with a letter which will show him that he has been too hasty."

"Good: so much for your father. Now for your *fiancée*. What will she say of this retreat?"

"She well knows that the mightiest armies—and ours are very small—are obliged to countermarch at times. Ah, my severe cousin, I can imagine all there is behind your silence. Hold! I would like to know what you would do in *my* place?"

"You want to know what I would do, if at twenty-four I had the happiness to be loved by a beautiful, young, devoted woman, capable of sufficient courage of sharing with me a life that would seem sub

lime to her, provided love crowned it? Well, my dear Alain, I should go and seek that woman out; I should bring her here. How? I know not. But I would snatch her from every conventionalism in the world, from all refusals, every obstacle. That is what *I* should do, my friend."

The viscount opened his great eyes. With a mixture of astonishment, admiration, and irony, he exclaimed:

"I thought you quite another man!"

"Yes," answered Cléguérac. "You would quit 'The Hermitage' with a certain amount of consideration for me. You would say to yourself: He was a man! he supports all—cold, heat, fatigue, Rabat's cookery. He does not spend his time in idle dreams. You would also say: He is as big a fool as the rest of them. Confess it."

"With your permission," said Alain, "and if I dared to use your words, I should perhaps say that you would appear to me an even bigger fool than the rest."

"All right! But stay, I did not close my eyes last night on your account. I was imagining, a little too hastily, it seems, having you for a neighbor, and in a pretty little house not very far away your wife. You see nothing in that to prevent an honest man from sleeping. Ah, it is because you have not lived alone for years upon the prairies, alone with two stern comrades, work and will. One day, racing after some runaway horses, I met, about twenty miles from here, a neighbor who per-

suaded me to sleep at his farm-house. If you had only seen his farm! A log-cabin built of rough rude trunks of trees. But in that cabin was a window; at that window a young woman was seated. My host pointed her out to me *when nearly half a mile off*. 'I am late,' said he. 'Maggie is at her observatory; I must be ready with my excuses; for she gets uneasy if I do not enter at the proper instant.'

"We penetrated an interior I need not seek to paint. But when that wife clung to her husband's neck as though he had escaped from shipwreck, all for half an hour's detention on his part, I fancied I was in a palace. Nevertheless, his poor Maggie bore, I imagine, but the faintest possible resemblance to Mademoiselle Montdauphin. When I reentered 'The Hermitage' the next day my castle seemed to me the dingiest of huts, because no human soul awaited me. Am I not ridiculous?"

"No," answered Alain, "but in spite of our calendar ages, it is I who am the oldest."

Maurice looked at his watch. He had forgotten the hour in his theme, a thing that with him happened very seldom.

"I leave you, then, to pack your baggage," said he to his cousin, "and will prepare for your departure. This time be easy in your mind; your baggage shall not pause upon the way."

The traveller was once more *en route* for New York. Maurice had regained his solitude, but he no longer found the same tranquillity of spirit. At

first he felt the unpleasing sensations of the spectator who, beholding the best rôle in a fine piece ill-played, can hardly help saying aloud:

"How much better I could play it myself."

Then, as he thought on the weaknesses in Alain's character, he reproached himself with not having sufficiently tried to argue him out of them, with not having sufficiently encouraged his guest's better instincts. And, at last, he laughed at himself for having taken that nature, incapable of sacrifice or strife, so seriously. As for Mademoiselle de Montdauphin, he only thought of her to pity her, and also to admire her, which was admiration on credit, seeing how very little he knew of that interesting young person. He was astonished at the viscount's great reserve while speaking of her, not understanding that it sprang from embarrassment. But having to judge the unknown through imagination, he made her a rare type, not only of beauty but of tenderness, fidelity, and courage. Thus, for him, she existed—a woman loving enough to abandon the pleasures of her family, her country, and civilization, to follow her husband to an almost savage desert.

If he had preserved energy enough to consecrate to his duties the usual amount of intelligence and energy, it must be admitted that he went through them in extreme ill-humor. When he arrived at "The Hermitage," he had made a compact with himself that he would be rich within a dozen years or perish on the plains. Till then, in the midst of present impossibilities and future uncertainties, it was

throwing away time to dream of the supreme domestic joy of hearth and family. In fact, before Alain's arrival, he thought of marriage maybe twice a year, and in the same way as the cavalryman, sword in hand upon the field, thinks of the pleasures of the bivouac—that is to say, at the actual moment impracticable, in the future doubtful.

Then beholding the advent of this cousin from the great world who spoke as of a very natural thing of bringing a young and charming wife upon the prairie, Cléguérac began to reflect himself, and ask if his own reveries had not been far too modest. From that hour Robinson Crusoe found his island lonely; he began to sleep uneasily at night. But, in defiance of his prototype, his trouble was the absence of a footprint on the shore. Nevertheless, Friday was destined shortly to appear.

One day Maurice was at breakfast, waited on by Rabat, and less from curiosity than pity put up with his verbosity. We must say that the sailor, for the same reason as a parrot, talked because he couldn't help himself, and only asked the privilege of a listener. And subjects of interest were by no means common. The sojourn of young Lavandien and his abrupt departure were talked out. Besides, that young man, in spite of a handsome present, had left a disagreeable impression on Rabat's mind.

"I do not allow myself to judge monsieur's friends, but I don't think M. de Lavandien will ever come back here. He had his people to visit! From the very moment when I saw him talking to

the Prussian, my opinion was made up about him. Monsieur speaks sometimes to the father, it is true, but monsieur is obliged. Monsieur would never allow himself to be wheedled by our spies."

For a long time Maurice did not attempt to argue this point with Rabat. He had admitted that the Baron Oberkorn came to the Great North West expressly in order to notify Bismarck as to the deeds and movements of two prairie Frenchmen.

That day, contrary to his custom, the sailor dropped one thing that sounded like a question.

"Monsieur, have we any remedy in our pharmacy for inflammation of the chest?"

Cléguérac, at this warning of illness in the vicinity, started from his reverie and asked:

"Is it one of our own men who is ill?"

"No, monsieur. Thank heaven, I think it is only Mademoiselle d'Oberkorn. Her father was here this morning."

"The Baron d'Oberkorn has called on me!"

"Oh, monsieur, he did not go in," the sailor proudly said, misunderstanding the reason of his master's tone.

"And he desired——"

"With as much as I could make out of his jargon, I caught these few words, 'inflammation of the chest,' 'very ill indeed,' 'some remedy,' 'poor child.' Would you believe it, he wept, monsieur. A Prussian weeping!"

"Have you never wept, Rabat?" said Cléguérac, quickly quitting the table.

"Yes, monsieur. When Courbet died. But then, he was our admiral!"

Maurice was already on the wing. A quarter of an hour afterward he entered the "Gray House" for the first time in his life; for all his previous interviews with his neighbor, always on matters of business, had taken place at the miniature office of the sugar factory or on the way to Wabigoon.

The German immigrant girl who acted as domestic help introduced Maurice, without any questions, into Irene's little chamber. Maiden modesty, race hatred, all must stand aside before the common enemy. The father was seated before a couch of dazzling whiteness whose sky-blue ball-trimmed hangings lent an air of extravagant luxury to so much poverty. Just now the Prussian dared not weep. All the while watching his daughter's troubled respiration, he tried to maintain an outward calm, which hurt Maurice to see more than a cataract of sobs.

At the sound of the door opening, Irene lifted her heavy eyelids. She recognized her visitor, appeared greatly struck with surprise, and then allowed a gleam of joy to sweep out from her eyes, which she instantly closed again.

"Heavens! I am very very ill," she murmured in German.

Cléguérac answered in English, the language he always used in conversation with the baron.

"Mademoiselle, you are not so very very ill and we must not allow you to become so. I am

about to place my services at your father's disposal. What says the doctor?"

"We have not seen him yet," stammered Oberkorn. "Wabigoon is so far away. I have not dared to leave my daughter, and we had nobody to take so long a journey for us."

Cléguérac, meanwhile, had not removed his eyes from Irene's features. He thought he saw her for the first time now, and was thunderstruck to find her marvellously beautiful. In fact, she showed just then a burning beauty, thanks to the fever that painted her face, and one of the strongest emotions that ever filled the heart of sweet sixteen. Never had a similar flow of liquid gold flooded the embroidered satin pillow of a queen. Her malady had swept away every trait that was derogatory to her loveliness, or made an odious contrast with it, such as her inevitable hat and skirt, those articles that showed what they should not and hid what should have been revealed.

No longer could poor Irene ever tell herself that she was always passed unnoticed by Maurice. She had the joy of being looked at, of feeling, knowing herself admired, of appearing, at last, in a not unbecoming costume, the only one within their humble means—a gown of spotless white set off by bows of the color of her eyes. She smiled with happiness, so much so that her father imagined her already cured. She smiled again for very satisfaction in having at last solved the hideous mystery: "Decidedly—it *was* that skirt!"

All of a sudden the smile vanished, and the cheeks grew three shades paler.

"What *shall* I do when I have to get up once more and dress myself? Suppose he passes me by unnoticed all over again!"

Alas! a somewhat premature question. A violent access of coughing supervened—it was no longer a question of smiles or no smiles. Maurice said a word in the baron's ear, who answered, in a broken tone:

"Sir, if I could do it without disquieting my daughter, I would throw myself at your knees to thank you."

Cléguérac disappeared. Irene, in the middle of her coughing spell, found strength to murmur in her father's ear:

"Why did he go away?"

"Do not talk. He is gone to Wabigoon to fetch MacAllan."

The cough recommenced, but the expression of the suffering child almost resembled a smile. She pictured Maurice galloping thirty miles—for her—without slack or halt.

Gallop, Annie, brave steed! Over the naked plain, nothing to encounter on one's way save the chilly breeze, mother of the snow that was to follow—against one of those attacks of inflammation that often build a tomb in four-and-twenty hours!

If only MacAllan is at Wabigoon! MacAllan, that grizzled Irishman, doctor, surgeon, accoucheur,

dentist, druggist, tuner of pianos, and—rest astonished, Molière—life insurance agent!

Oh, what luck! it is the doctor himself who opens the door to Maurice.

"Here you are, doctor. What a piece of good fortune."

"Unlucky chance. My tablets tell me of twenty-seven promised visits. Twenty-seven guineas thrown away!"

"You shall not lose the twenty-eighth, I tell you. Quickly come."

"To your house?"

"Quite close to it; the Baron d'Oberkorn's. His daughter is exceedingly ill with pneumonia."

"Heaven aid her! As for me, I cannot make my visits on foot in a country where the houses are contiguous in the same sense as the planets in the sky."

"Your horse is lame?"

"Worse—he is dead."

"Take Annie; but race to the baron's."

"I know your horse, sir. If I get a broken shoulder the baron will not set it."

"Well, then, get up behind. On the word of a Breton, if you don't I will carry you, dead or alive, across my saddle!"

"Listen to me, crazy Frenchman. We will go in search of a vehicle. I like Annie better between two shafts than under *me*."

The turnout organized, "quick and bad," as the

doctor called it, half the contents of MacAllan's pharmacy was put aboard (Maurice wished to take it all in order to be on the safe side) and a start was made.

At the end of two minutes, or, if you prefer it, of half a mile, the Irishman's teeth began to chatter with alarm.

"You have been drinking," he cried, "or you are madly in love with the poor girl. But if you go on in this crazy fashion we shall both come to our deaths before she will."

When the doctor, closely followed by his guide, entered Irene's room, the baron rubbed his eyes, thinking he was dreaming.

"Less than four hours going and returning to Wabigoon!" he cried.

But quicker even than Annie had the malady galloped during those few hours. Half-way between reason and delirium, the spirit of the young girl floated. While the doctor gave the father the necessary instructions, Cléguérac approached the bed. With an unexpected swift but gentle movement Irene took his hand, and holding it hard between her burning fingers, softly sighed:

"Oh! do not leave me now to die."

"My poor child," said the baron in broken tones, beckoning to the physician. "She recognizes nobody any longer. She takes our young neighbor for you."

The Irishman's gray eyes had lost no iota of the little scene. Already had he opened his mouth to

reply when, on second thought, he made no answer, approaching the bed in his turn.

"Mademoiselle, be kind enough to let me have your hand."

Maurice left the room. Irene followed his every footstep with a gaze from which the glow went out when he had disappeared.

It was not the end of the affair to have brought the doctor; he must be taken back. Happily, Blackfoot, Alain's horse, was available. Not too much so, not having been mounted for a week. He had never been between the shafts in his life. But this detail is considered of little importance in the Great North West.

The consultation over, all remedies prepared and ordered, MacAllan took his place in the buggy once more beside Cléguérac. Blackfoot started off like an arrow in the direction of the only stable he had ever known. Hardly had he reached the summit of the "Gray House" knoll than the animal had the bit between his teeth. If Wabigoon had only been a few miles nearer, our travellers would have run the greatest risk to life and limb by traversing the streets with the velocity of rockets.

But toward the twentieth mile Blackfoot began to slacken speed. Never will Lavandien know what a magnificent trotter he has lost!

The doctor did not open his mouth during the transit; in fact, his teeth were too painfully clinched to allow him. As he left the buggy, Maurice asked: "What ails her?"

"Pneumonia, very likely," answered MacAllan, wiping away the cold perspiration that was streaming down his face.

And as his companion continued to look inquiringly, puzzled by the tone and answer:

"Do you know what I was just thinking of?" went on the Canadian Æsculapius. "Of an inscription I once read on a rock that juts out at the source of the most famous hot spring in Japan."

"What said this rock?"

"It said—as now old Dr. MacAllan tells you:

"'*I can cure every malady*
SAVE LOVE.'"

IX.

THE next morning Maurice hastened to the "Gray House" for the news. Oberkorn met him at the door.

"The child is better. She is in her senses now."

"That good MacAllan——" Cléguérac was beginning.

The baron interrupted Maurice, seizing both his hands, and spoke with a warmth that showed him in an entirely new light.

"Monsieur, for the present let us not talk about doctors. Irene's recovery is due to you. You have done for her all that you could do for the daughter of your dearest friend. What good can the gratitude of one worsted, like myself, so wofully in the battle of life do you? but little good, alas! But you are the master of this house, and you have conquered me, my dear French gentleman. I honor you, and I would I had it in my power to give you all your good and loyal heart deserves."

"Amen," said Maurice gravely, pressing the German's hand.

He continued his route toward the sugar-houses, whither his ordinary work now called him.

"Monsieur," continued the father, "forgive a poor sick girl's caprices. Irene made me promise solemnly that if you came I would conduct you to her. Do her that favor: five minutes will suffice."

Cléguérac entered and only remained five minutes. They did not want to let him go. He had to threaten:

"I shall return for MacAllan. He will forbid you seeing any living soul, and he will once more put the cupping-glasses on you."

"Oh, no, no, no. They hurt so much," sighed the child. "But you will come to-morrow?"

"Yes, if you let me go before I tire you out."

"You will come again to-morrow, and the next day, and the next, and every day, until I am entirely well?"

"I promise you. Quick, put back your hand. It is cold."

"On your word of honor?"

"On my word of honor."

"It is well. You may go now. I am at rest in my mind."

Maurice kept his word to the letter. After each visit, always very short, the baron conducted him to the gate with the usual question:

"Really, you think that she is better?"

One day Oberkorn said to his neighbor:

"How well you know how to make the child laugh at trifles. It is because you are happy. When she is with me it is she, on the contrary, who tries to make me smile, but often I forget my rôle.

How good of you it is to pretend to be interested in my poor child's silly prattle!"

Poor Irene! Even her father fancied her still in the short-skirted stage.

Some time afterward the convalescent stage began. Cléguérac encountered the baron no more. The excellent man was busy with his farm, which had not gained, we may suppose, during the crisis. The German girl was sewing near her young mistress.

"Take a seat on this sofa—our sofa," said Irene. "Take off your muffler."

"I have not lent you my plaid to cover your furniture."

"Always scolding! When I see your neck-shawl in front of me it seems that something of yourself is keeping company with me. Do you think, ever, by any chance, that it was you who saved my life?"

"Come, come; as if it was possible to die in a country where there are no cemeteries."

"Everything must have a beginning. My father has built his first house; I should have been the cause of digging the first grave. The very place is indicated in my will."

"Aha!" said Cléguérac, in a jesting tone, "so you have made your will. You are a young lady of foresight. At least, may I hope that I am among the beneficiaries?"

Irene's great eyes fixed themselves on Maurice with that pure and loyal intensity of look they showed at his lightest question.

"There is only one difficulty. I have nothing worth giving. I am as poor as a beggar."

"Can you say that?" retorted Cléguérac. "On your head you carry more gold than would suffice to gild the 'Gray House' from foundation to roof."

It was the first time Irene had ever listened to a personal compliment. Reddening with ingenuous joy she asked:

"My hair pleases you?"

"More than pleases, it enchants me. I have never seen the like."

"Indeed," said she, with a singular smile. "Then behold your legacy."

During a minute she was silent, lost in some mysterious train of thought. A universal shudder shook her. Maurice took his plaid and wrapped her shoulders in it. She nestled back, immobile, in a sort of ecstasy. Then she said, with half-closed eyes:

"How good you are. But I was not cold."

"You *are* cold, on the contrary. I saw you tremble."

Irene shook her head, without describing the vision that had made her shudder. Cléguérac continued:

"You are imprudent beyond description. Now you see what you gain by remaining hours in the cold breeze improperly sheltered. Between ourselves, I hardly understand what makes you so infatuated with your veranda."

"From there I can behold the passers-by."

"The passers-by!" cried Maurice, laughing heartily. "Poor little Sister Anne. Beyond myself, who pass two or three times a day— If, at least, you were a little more warmly clothed."

A sudden blush empurpled Irene's face to the very eyes.

She remembered a certain allusion, differently meant, made by Alain, to her short dress. Now she remained ill at ease till the conclusion of the visit, and, when Maurice went, she obtained a promise that he would bring back with him the next time he went to Wabigoon, Minnie, the pastor's wise, kind, copper-headed daughter Minnie, confidante of all the better young ladies of the district, their looking-glass of decorum and behavior.

A few days afterward, Minnie descended from Cléguérac's buggy in front of the "Gray House." What those two friends had to talk about for eight-and-forty hours nobody will ever know. When the city young lady regained the wood châlet decorated with the pompous title of "The Vicarage," she took with her an armory of notes, calculations, and one package imperceptibly damp with tears, from which crept, when all was still, like a last adieu, the sad little tick-tack of Irene's mother's poor little gold watch.

A fortnight went by. Faithful to his word, every afternoon Maurice spent a few minutes with Irene, going to his business. He began to fancy she had grown too prudent, that she hesitated more and more each time to make the first advance across

the room. Nevertheless the thought that he would soon pass in front of that house daily without being under any obligation to enter, proved by no means pleasant. Their daily conversation, often very short, for the most part of the time kept alive by almost childish jests and allusions, stirred a sweetness in his life that he had not known since he came to "The Hermitage," an appetite for which he now began to feel with some insistance.

But one fine day he was gloriously surprised to behold, in *her* fauteuil, in Irene's chamber, the prettiest woman he had seen since quitting France. The convalescent, for it was she, rose and came to meet him with outstretched hand. She was dressed in a new robe, which a Parisian might possibly have found a little behind the fashions, but which had the greatest advantage a robe can possess: that of not obscuring the personal advantages of its wearer. The only fault with which one could reproach it, at first glance, was that of being a little too long in the skirt. Irene von Oberkorn was evidently anxious to make up for lost time.

Maurice had the good taste—and heart—to accentuate and prolong his expression of admiration and surprise. Did he understand that, even at that moment, thanks to him, the young girl snatched from death was tasting the purest, greatest joy that she had ever known? At least she saw herself regarded, appreciated, judged, as though she were *somebody*. No longer was she the disdained child, the spoilt invalid. Just as she would have done in

one of Worth's salons, she marched to the right and to the left, partly because she hardly knew yet how to set those multitudinous folds that seemed to caress her feet so deliciously. She smiled at her reflection in front of the uneven old chimney mirror. She criticised her coiffure, rather well than ill arranged, after a lesson given her by Minnie. But such was the golden wealth of the rough material that the eye dwelt less on form than color. Tired of admiring herself and being admired in silence, she went up to Maurice and, standing right in front of him, exclaimed abruptly:

"Then I have pleased you?"

"Greatly," answered he, unable to find a longer phrase.

"'Greatly' only; not very, very much?"

He dropped his eyes before this very ignorance of purity, which sported with coquetry as with some unknown arm, picked up by chance.

"Yes, 'very, very much,' then," he admitted.

"You are not of the same opinion in regard to me you used to be?"

"I *had* no opinion."

"Oh, as to that, you say truly. You considered me an infant. And, no doubt, you are not very fond of children?"

"From whom, may I ask, did you so succinctly gather what was on my mind?"

"From your friend the Parisian. Who save him? But you have not answered me. Have I still the appearance of a child?"

Cléguérac fixed his eyes for an instant on the young girl, and in that look which she obtained in answer to her secret wish, something magnetic, hitherto unknown, vibrated.

"No, mademoiselle," said Maurice, bowing, "you have no longer the appearance of a child."

They sat down and would have talked—but on what subject?

The visitor beat about for phrases, and involuntarily cast his eyes over his rough prairie costume. Irene saw and understood the look.

"One would say, now, that I was putting you in awe."

"No; only I cannot get out of my head that I came to be presented to your dear sister. And I do not easily forget old friends."

As he rose to go:

"Well," said Irene, "senior or junior, both sisters love you equally well; and they bid you good-by, with good luck until to-morrow."

"But you are well now, mademoiselle," said Maurice, turning his straw hat in his hands restlessly.

Irene contracted her eyebrows, as though to combat an anticipated objection.

"Listen carefully to me. If you do not stop to-morrow, as you have done every day for a month, lift your head as you go by again in the evening. On the honor of an Oberkorn, I swear to you Sister Anne will be looking from her tower. So much the worse for you if you are forced to go again in search of Dr. MacAllan."

One could read in Irene's eyes, blazing with exaltation, that she would carry out her foolish threat. Cléguérac quickly promised to stop, and as she reached out her hand, without thinking he lifted it to his lips, which Irene von Oberkorn seemed to think a very natural thing. Only the immigrant girl allowed her sewing to drop on her knees, opening her large eyes, as though she was looking at unknown people.

The evening of that day, one of long twilights of autumn, was, without exception, the pleasantest that Maurice had ever passed beneath his solitary roof. And yet he had known many happy hours there, the quiet hours that followed every new progress in his various enterprises, pledges of ultimate success. But at last he had the certainty, contrary to every hope, that his was now the happiness, long dreamed, of being followed by every thought of a sweet and gracious creature, the consciousness of a loving shadow with him in his every step. He was no longer *alone!* A few hundred yards away lived a sweet child, woman in virtue of a consciousness that she as yet ignored, whose happiness or misery were inseparably connected with her neighbor's lightest acts. No longer did he envy the happily-mated young farmer he had visited in his prairie home. He, too, when the clock should sound a certain hour, would be able to say to himself: "She is awaiting me!"

Perhaps we may accuse this man of egotism, who thus tasted the sweetness of being loved without

entirely loving in return. But we may reply, firstly, that if he was grateful for the good received, Irene, making the gift, was even more so. In the second place, if Cléguérac was hardly of those, or no longer of those who fall in love at first sight, he belonged, to all appearance, to those on whom a love like that of Irene's is sure to make a deep and satisfactory impression. But above all, let us seek to imagine what he suffered, for years, in the chill surroundings of his life! Never had he complained, even to himself, that his life was too rough, his work too overwhelming. But very rarely had he gone to sleep without asking himself what would happen, some day, if some grave sickness prevented him from rising. And if death itself should knell for him in his full youth, the mighty voyage—what a taking-leave!

One must have known, in order to appreciate its power, the instinctive want that every human being feels of being mourned for in the hour supreme. Necessities, confronted by this luxury of the heart, appear superfluous.

Such, in the hours following Irene's unexpected revelation, had been the thoughts of Maurice de Cléguérac.

The next day, all through the morning, he had the unknown pleasure of saying to himself:

"I will tell *her* what I have been doing. I will consult her on such and such an undertaking."

For he felt drawn to this pure young soul by the bonds of a measureless confidence, so young, yet

already so judicious and so just! In seeing her again he experienced a satisfaction greater even than he anticipated. The immigrant had disappeared; Irene was sewing near the fire. She interrupted her work in order to hold out her hand.

"Your fauteuil awaits you," she smiled, "and will await you always."

The "always" from that mouth appeared a simple setting of the truth. Who, then, except Maurice, would conceive the idea of taking the place in question? And what other fauteuil, save this one, could ever be designed for him by another lady-neighbor? Both these beings felt an instinct that it was the will of fate they should be friends, as Cléguérac self-explained it, sitting down.

"Yes," answered the girl, "and yet it was fated that the angel of the grave himself had to fetch you, in order that you should now be seated where you are. How many a year, after that, would you have passed me by with a sweeping courtesy, and without a look? Oh, those bows!"

"Can I doubt that you honor me with your curiosity, my bows with—indignation?"

"You can, it seems to me, after one has told you so expressly in so many words."

"I have been told, on your part, personally," said Cléguérac, laughing.

"Oh!" answered Irene, very seriously. "You have been told, and you have saluted the prettiest as you would have saluted the most evil spirit."

"Was it by any chance my friend Lavandien who charged himself with such an embassy?"

"Can you tell me he never asked you to accompany him here?"

"Alain!" cried Maurice, laughing loudly. "You had an excellent messenger. He simply never told me he had even been to see you."

Irene became purple, but this time the blush was one of righteous anger.

"I did not think I was one of those with whom it is necessary to hide one's acquaintance," said she, drawing herself up. "The grandest gentlemen in Germany at one time thought it an honor to be received by my mother and to kiss her hand."

"There, there, child, calm yourself. I would not allow any of my friends to show the faintest disrespect for Baron d'Oberkorn's daughter. Only——"

He broke off abruptly, asking himself if it were generous to trouble such happy ignorance by calling up the hideous phantom ever in activity six thousand miles away.

Irene, tapping her foot, insisted.

"I want to know your thought," said she.

"You shall know it. In order to that end, I must ask you a question. Did you ever get to understand the meaning of the great word War?"

"Undoubtedly. I have learned history. War is a duel between two nations."

"Yes, but a duel of a peculiar kind, where the conqueror sleeps on the bed of the wounded, which renders reconciliation rather difficult. Did they

tell you the name of the opponents in the grand duel that made Europe tremble, now twenty years ago?"

"It was so long ago," cried Irene von Oberkorn gayly. "I was not born."

"Alain de Lavandien was born; and, besides, with us, who forget many things so quickly, even the young men who were not born remember *that*."

Irene grew pale. One would have said that a gust of glacial air had fallen on her shoulders, to see the light shiver that stirred her.

"Which of your relations remained among the dead?" asked Irene, involuntarily lowering her voice.

"None; at least near ones," answered Cléguérac.

She sighed contentedly.

"Ah! you frighten me. How you looked!"

"Why should I not curse a war that has wrought such infinite evil?"

"You say has wrought you so much evil? What would you say in my place? Do you know what that war was to me and mine?"

A profound sadness chased smiles and youth from that sixteen-year-old face. Maurice was deeply touched, and felt very angry with himself for having touched the dreadful subject.

"Let those sleep who sleep, and suffer who suffer. As you said just now, it is so long ago."

"Alas! for you it is yet too near at hand. In a second I have understood it all. If I should lose your friendship! You will see we have only to pity

each other, only to pity each other. My father had been married two months when he went away——"

"Ah!" cried Cléguérac, passing his hand over his forehead. "He fought against us, then?"

"Did you think to hear that an Oberkorn had deserted in the face of the enemy—you who have worn a sword yourself? He went, as was his duty, leaving between life and death the one who lived but for him, my poor beloved mother. He fought, did I say? But not for long. The evening of the first engagement his name was among the dead in the dispatches. My mother went to the front. She found her husband, still breathing, in a hospital. At the end of a month they were able to bring him home. But all the winter he remained an invalid. I came into the world the day the peace was signed. Thence my name—do you know what it signifies?"

"Yes," answered Cléguérac, whose visage was clear again. "I know Irene means *peace*. Your name is as sweet as your eyes."

Already, she felt, her cause was gained. With a lighter heart she went on:

"So small and weak was I, it was a mighty task for me to live. As for my mother, she never knew from that day what health meant. This is what that war has done for us, of which you speak, clinching your fists and rolling your eyes to heaven. But I have never heard my parents curse it. Why this difference? Must one think your countrymen do not know how to resign themselves to inevitable evil?"

"Child," sighed Cléguérac, "certain evils cannot

be forgotten because they renew themselves every day."

"Your words seem meant for us, for the peace cost us more dearly than the war. My parents, in fair circumstances, lived in their own house, where I was born. They sold it to settle in Berlin, where my father obtained a position which kept us till I was twelve years old in affluence and comfort. Then we were branded with the most unjust of disgraces. All went to ruin; there was nothing left. Our ancient protectors impelled us to come here to seek better fortune. Had they acted in good faith? Were they now desirous of getting rid of us? I know not, neither do I know with what crime we were charged. I only know that on the eve of departure my mother fell sick. She died. I can always see my father near the bed, pale as the dead it supported, clasping my mother's cold hands, but shedding never a tear. Often I hear him say in a voice that has forever broken something in my heart: 'How well you have done, my darling, to go where you have gone, instead of going where *we* are going.'"

Fräulein von Oberkorn was silent. Cléguérac, turning his head, wiped away a tear. All at once his hand was seized, and two lips touched the spot where it was wet. A voice murmured so softly as to be scarcely audible: "Ah, *you* are my brother now!"

X.

DURING the night Cléguérac slept but little. He employed his morning, according to custom, in overlooking his various industrial and agricultural operations. Then he came in for breakfast, a repast he went through in profound silence.

Rabat, his white cap well pulled down over his head, resembled a mother-in-law that covets a scene with her son-in-law, but dare not begin. Neither his voice nor his steps were audible, nor was the slightest sound of clicking crockery heard—phenomena which showed the old mariner either to be in a discontented frame of mind, or to be desirous of bringing about what he called a simplification in his work. This literal dumb waiting at any ordinary time would have aggravated his master to the last degree. Happily he knew Rabat's family skeleton; that is to say, the existence of Zetie and accessories, by which means he could at any time cut short these affectations. Without this weapon in the master's hand the functions of the servant would have ere this ended by simplifying themselves down to zero.

But that day all such domestic thunder-clouds passed unperceived. Cléguérac ate "with the ends of his teeth." One would have said that he

was falling in love. By no means. He was simply growing thoughtful and somewhat troubled with the conversation of the night before, because it ended with the resolution, tacitly arrived at between the interlocutors, of avoiding in future a painful subject touched on for the first time between them.

On the previous evening, too, Fräulein von Oberkorn's thoughts had something in them very sweet to him, as of a flower that has suddenly bloomed with tropic perfume in the desert. To pluck that flower was not now the question. But it grew exceedingly near his reach. He could now, without a shadow or a doubt, rejoice to see that flower every day. He said to himself: "In spite of her long robe, she is still a child. To think of her otherwise would be madness. But some day, if my courage for solitary labor should suddenly abandon me, and I were to ask this child to be my wife—— Could I commit an act of madness more pleasing and more prudent?"

Alas! since the hazard of conversation had suddenly revived in his mind certain memories all was changed. The very name Irene struck his ears, at that hour, with a significance opposed to the mission of peace its meaning should suggest. His nerves were unhinged, crowned with thorns of roses, until his pleasing reverie became a painful problem.

"Would it not, indeed, be anything but a madness?" he asked himself.

Vainly he scolded himself for losing his time and spoiling his repose in subtleties that led to nothing, since he was not in love.

"You do not love," his thought responded, "but if you should grow to love!"

Fatigued with this internal revolt, Cléguérac had recourse to his will-power to subdue it. A powerful, indeed indomitable, will like his has grown to be such a rarity to-day that the psychologists no longer take much account of element of the soul, while they devote their attention to the workings of passion and inclination. One would say it is a piece that has been swept off the human chess-board. Such was not the case with Maurice, and we must have a little patience in order to behold him play his part a little differently from the ordinary run of men.

On reflection, he decided not only that he would pay a visit to Irene, but also that they should continue to be good, solid, sincere friends, without after-thought of sex or nation. None but honest, loyal, generous traits had ever been revealed by Maurice Cléguérac. Must he, in this lonely desert, renounce the unexpected joys of friendship, because certain memories of the past, certain forecasts into the future, might possibly disturb the calm? What he had to do was to put a seal on troublesome and useless inner voices. He knew he was strong enough to do this. As he had told his cousin, a few years of prairie life considerably thicken the mental epidermis of a man.

As for Irene, her night had not been much easier, but for another reason. She had not put herself to ask whether she loved or did not love Maurice, any more than she had asked herself what dress she should don on the morrow. The sweet girl had no choice. She asked herself two grand questions—"Will he come to-morrow?" and "What will be upon his mind?"

In this pessimistic frame of mind, which always produces insomnia joined to fixed ideas, she had recalled, reworded, plumbed the least details of last night's conversation.

"He wept when I told him of my mother's death," she told herself. "But in what a dreadful tone he asked me: 'Do you know what War is?' And how he started when he learned that papa had fought against the French. And then how natural he seemed to think it that his friend had concealed his visits to me. As he left me, kindness was his only instinct. But, his cooler judgment back, what will he think? Perhaps he ought not to come back here any more."

Such was the intensity of her reverie that she had no anxiety for her father's absence, detained, most probably, in Wabigoon by something unexpected. Alone in the cottage with a girl scarcely older than herself, Irene trembled not at the idea of Indians or intrusive cowboys, but at the thought that, perhaps, Maurice would not come again.

Thus, when she beheld him enter a few hours later, the poor Irene was on the point of burst-

ing into tears. But she restrained herself, forewarned by an instinct that at any and every price this visit must not be allowed to pass like the preceding. She knew how to interest Maurice, to amuse, and even make him laugh; and this young girl, pure as the lily yet reposing in its calyx, in order to do away with certain memories, utilized the same profound art that a guilty wife makes use of to close a too clairvoyant husband's eyes. Her first care was to abjure the French tongue under some pretext, which she knew she spoke with an atrocious accent. From that moment English became their diplomatic language. She mentioned her father's detention, and Maurice, who loved every form of courage, was glad to see Irene so brave.

"In spite of all that, had I but known you were alone, I should have ridden round beneath your ramparts."

"Good. I am a Canadian woman," said she, dwelling on the word, "a true Canadian. I do not need to be guarded like a girl in a nursery."

Questioned on the laborious life she was about to resume with restored health, she painted her rude duties very simply.

Cléguérac spoke in pity.

"No, no," she said. "The Great North West is not Europe. The ideas, sentiments, prejudices of our country evaporate here like the odor of a scented sachet in full sunshine. Here, no man suffers for saddling his horse himself. At Paris such a thing would be impossible. But what is impossi-

ble in Paris becomes quite natural upon the prairies."

A little after that Maurice took his leave, very well satisfied with the half-hour he had passed, and Irene somewhat reassured. Cléguérac slept very well that night, after thinking, by his lonely fireside, that the friendship of one sex with the other is not so uncommon as people say, without mentioning the fact that it is friendship's sweetest form.

Irene slept peacefully, after conversing with her father, home at length, till nearly midnight. But, this time, it was the Baron von Oberkorn who kept vigil for the rest of the world. An interview that he had had in Wabigoon swept away all thoughts of sleep.

The next day, at early morning, the first flakes of snow, heralds of the precocious winter of these latitudes, covered the grass with a glittering carpet that only lasted till the sun was up.

In preceding years this preliminary warning always caused Maurice a strange sensation, which he himself compared, in his letters, to the impression of the first cold of autumn on the swallow. It was one of the days when will should have spoken aloud: "You shall remain," to the Parisian who, waking within himself, felt the desire to leave the country. When he threw his eyes over the valley of Moose Brook, all white with powdery snow, he closed them again involuntarily, to see his well-beloved France in winter. He shivered with a new

sort of fear in his lonely chamber, where, very soon, a temperature of forty degrees below zero would detain him prisoner for a hundred nights, with the sole company of fire, lamp, and—Rabat. The Parisian world, which he mistrusted at other moments, appeared to him now like a sky peopled with the elect. He imagined salons one flood of brilliant light, inundated with perfume, peopled with lovely witty women; the conversations, light or sentimental, held round buffets of choicest meats and sweets and liquors; of the theatre, with the curtain going up on a new *chef-d'œuvre* to the strains of liveliest music. For at this distance and in such an exile, all he had left behind him in his own country seemed exquisite, desirable, and faultless.

What a difference between the winters of other days and that which was about to put in an appearance. Already he foresaw frequent evenings at the "Gray House," evenings of reading, intimate talk, of serious study, perhaps of music. For there were pianos at Wabigoon. The baron was a little rough, 'twas true, but his heart was easily reached. Probably concentrated chagrin made up more than two-thirds of his darker humors. To amuse him would be a charity which Irene and Maurice would undertake together.

All of a sudden Rabat made an irruption into his master's study in a state of most unusual excitement.

"Monsieur," cried the old sailor, "it is he—the Prussian!"

Feverishly he awaited Cléguérac's answer. A few months earlier he might have given that answer himself in the shape that "monsieur had gone out." But during the last few weeks he had assisted at so many unexpected changes that he no longer dared to take upon himself to close the door upon the enemy.

Instead of answering, Maurice bounded out of the house crying: "She must be taken sick again!"

The baron, left provisionally outside, was walking up and down the frosty grass. Though a rough grizzled beard half covered his face, yet above shone a pair of melancholy, strange, soft blue eyes—Irene's eyes—an unexpected contrast that rendered the face of the baron sympathetic before all things. His costume in nothing gave the lie to his circumstances. Yet it was easy to see that he had been unusually careful ere presenting himself before his neighbor. In all his person shone an air of ceremony. At first sight, Maurice understood that he had not now before him a father crazed with anxiety, seeking succor for an ailing daughter.

The neighbors saluted with a politeness rather anxious on the Frenchman's part, on that of the other, ceremonious and unusual.

"Monsieur," said the Baron von Oberkorn, hat in hand, "can you accord me the honor of a few minutes' interview?"

These solemnities increased Maurice's perplexity, who did not find his visitor so easy to handle.

He designated the way in with a wave of his hand, standing aside to leave the entrance free.

"Be kind enough to take the trouble to go in." An oath from the considerable collection of the ancient mariner was deadened by the kitchen windows. "The Prussian," for the first time in his life, had penetrated "The Hermitage"! Suddenly the old sea-wolf slapped his forehead, ran to one of the drawers of what he called his steward's room, and with a shaking hand took out his national flag, which had not floated in the prairie breeze since the arrival of the Viscount de Lavandien. A few seconds afterward "the colors" were flying from the roof masthead, not, this time, as a signal of rejoicing, but as a witness of protestation and defiance.

Rabat could do no more. He drew back a dozen paces in order to see that the bunting floated freely, gravely removed his calico cap, and entered his kitchen singing at the top of his voice the old refrain that makes fun of the austere figure of "the admiral."

"'Hoist, hoist the flag to the halliard-top,
To wave all else above:
And there forever shall it stop,
The brave French flag we love.'"

During this time, in Cléguérac's parlor, the interview asked by the baron was beginning.

"Monsieur," said he, "as long as I live and whatever may happen, it will appear impossible for me to see in you anything else but a friend. Without your aid I should have been overwhelmed with the

only disaster, the only real disaster, that fate can yet have in reserve for me. You will understand this easily, because my daughter has given you an outline of my life."

Maurice opened his mouth to say what respect such purity and misfortune inspired him with. His visitor interrupted him with a wave of the hand, and continued:

"I do not blame Irene for confiding in you. How could she have done otherwise, poor isolated girl? It is enough to see you to know the kind of man you are. And then the child has never seen any other man save yourself; I mean a man capable of engaging her fancy. Add to that that her heart, the most loyal and loving that ever beat in a woman's breast, retains an enthusiastic gratitude toward you."

"I have done my best to prevent that feeling becoming exaggerated," answered Cléguérac.

"I know, down to the last syllable, all that you have said to my daughter; but I equally well know each of her thoughts. Since she could speak, particularly since we have been all the world to each other, she has always made me read her heart like an open book. For the second time I am come to you to ask you to send succor to my child. But to-day it is against yourself I invoke that aid."

Maurice passed his hand over his forehead and reflected for a few moments.

"Whatever you ask me to do," he said, "I will do it."

"Oh, I do not doubt that! I have beheld you at the worst. One thing only is wanting; the knowledge of what I ought to ask of you."

The baron smiled, while at the same time an infinite sorrow shone from his deep eyes. The two men sat silent for a long minute without looking at each other.

"You will tell yourself it is a strange thing for me to approach you in such a way. Had we been in Europe, I would have spared you this annoyance. One finds a relation, a respectable friend, a priest, to accomplish similar missions. But were we in Europe, the child would know a mass of things she does not know. Conversation, reading, what she would observe with her own eyes, all would apprise her that the life of the heart, even more than life itself, is full of obstacles. Poor child! she judges the future to be like the prairie that surrounds her, where the eye itself can find no obstacle or limitation. Last night she said to me: 'If you only knew how happy I am to have, at last, a friend.' But as for me, monsieur, I perceive what this friendship will turn into, how this happiness will end."

"You would judge me better if you knew my life, even as partially as I know yours," said Maurice.

"Who speaks of judging you? Do you think I feel the shadow of a fear at the knowledge that you and my daughter are alone? You have no love for her, you never will, you say. So be it. It is mar-

tyrdom, pure and simple, I am preparing for this heart of sixteen, without chance of alleviation—a desert martyrdom. But if you should deceive yourself? If, some day, you should think of her as, even now, she thinks of you? My daughter has no money—and she is a German."

"Alas!" sighed Cléguérac.

"You say alas. Then you are not so sure of never loving her, or you foresee that love, with you, never will be able to forget the rest?"

The young colonist did not know how to answer. This cold logic of beyond the Rhine, set up in face of his will, mutely irritated him, a man accustomed to overcome all, even his personal feelings, by dint of force of will. As though the baron had guessed the uneasiness produced by his words, he went on, placing himself at another point of view.

"Do not think I accuse you of exaggerating certain sentiments. Neither you nor I have created the reciprocal situation; to analyze it, judge it, will not serve our purpose. It exists. So much so that if you were this night to ask me for my daughter, you would place me in a position of the cruellest embarrassment. For I could not hope that you would pass the remainder of your lives in the desert. But what kind of reception, in your family, your country, should you return, would be vouchsafed to Irene de Cléguérac, *née* D'Oberkorn?"

"Monsieur," said Maurice, "do not be surprised if I am short of words. The subject is a difficult one and I—well—ill-prepared."

"Am I to understand that you are surprised in this extreme frankness on a father's part? You would be wrong, I say. What are we, save two shipwrecked men, struggling on an uninhabited coast for our life and health and the life and health of a woman? In such cases men of heart have but one mutual thought: *First save the woman.* Come; the same duty unites us. For the moment the rest of the world, with its formulas and conventions, for us does not exist. Thanks to heaven our minds are worthy of each other."

"Yes, certainly," put in Maurice. "Say one word and I will nevermore darken your doors."

"And afterward," said the baron, shaking his head. "Is it to be my task to prevent the girl from sitting down in the killing north wind, overlooking the road along which passes—that which she calls *Friendship?*"

Silence reigned anew. The two men watched the blue dancing flames that leaped and purred about the burning logs. Suddenly Maurice rose and fiercely paced the room, then as suddenly stopped before the baron.

"Push frankness to the bitter end. Do you want me to go away for a time, for the winter, let us say? But have I the right to do so? In the mean time who would look over all these interests in which others have a share?"

"Who? I. If you would give me your confidence," said the baron, with a brightening countenance.

Cléguérac interrupted his renewed walk and went and laid his forehead on the frosty window-panes. This word of departure he had let slip, hardly knowing how or why, now echoed disagreeably in his ears. Why had he spoken it? In one instant he passed in mental review the many seductions of his country, so eloquent to him in former years. Just now the world and its pleasures, jolly dinners, the theatres, music, nothing seemed to him worth the effort of separation from his home. In truth, this voyage to France, impossible under other conditions, would become advantageous from the moment a safe man promised to oversee the farm. Maurice had accounts to settle with those who had helped him with capital. The regularity of his business correspondence had been irreproachable, but many times he had been made to feel that verbal explanations would have been preferable. Vain efforts to convince himself! In spite of all the idea that he was about to leave "The Hermitage" affected him in the most disagreeable way; henceforward, for him, it would be no longer exile on the prairie——

Some one touched him on the shoulder. He turned and felt his visitor's eyes fixed on him.

"You hesitate now to go," said the baron. "Is that not a sign that it is best, even for you, to leave us?"

"Do not speak of me," answered the young man. "What will you gain by my departure? Some day or other I must come back again."

"Assuredly, you will come back. But, during these long weeks of *tête-à-tête* in the snowy desert, I shall have my daughter's heart and soul in the hollow of my hand. I will gently tell her many, many things she is ignorant of relating to herself, life, and the painful past. It is a duty I owe her; it would be next to impossible if you were all the time at hand. You may go away with an easy mind; your greater labors of the year are past, the refinery is closed for the cold season. And I shall be here to overlook all, I, your devoted, grateful servant all your life. You will go, will you not?"

"I will leave in a few days," said Cléguérac. "Till then, what must I do?"

"The same as you have done the last few days. Come to see us. Yourself announce to the child that it is imperatively necessary you should go to France. Poor child! It is long since she has had to face the dread meaning of that word must. Do not tell her you have seen me. If she were to guess at anything and desire me to—— In fine, as she calls you her brother, manage her as you would wish that your sister, in her place, were managed."

The interview concluded with these words. Cléguérac reconducted his visitor to the outer steps. As they were about to separate, the baron heard the rustling of the flag overhead now frozen in the breeze. He lifted his head, then bent it slightly, and said, with a significant gesture:

"I already knew that I was in the house of a good Frenchman."

Rabat, in ambuscade behind his kitchen window, felt a proud stir through every vein at this courteous homage to the flag. From that day he got into the habit of lifting his cap whenever he encountered the baron, who saluted him, as the old sailor said, "stroke for stroke."

The same day, seeing her neighbor enter, Irene said to him:

"What has happened? You have a look of distress. Your face is altogether altered."

Cléguérac seized the first argument he got hold of, spoke of his difficulties with agents, of insufficient capital, and of a probable approaching trip to France.

Long and painfully did Irene's bosom heave; she closed her eyes, made an effort to hold herself upright, and asked this single question, holding Maurice with the light of her eyes:

"You will come back?"

He answered, attempting a smile:

"I can hardly be dispensed with, unless you take the direction of my refinery and ranch."

"Heavens! how wrong people are to try and arrange the future," she said, without noticing the jest. "I had counted on a winter different, quite, from all preceding ones. . . . What has happened since yesterday?"

"A letter——" stammered Maurice, fumbling in his pocket so as not to have to meet Irene's eyes.

He lied ill, being unaccustomed, but he lied just well enough to deceive a candor ignorant of every kind of lie. Without seeing her visitor's dissimulative pantomime, she asked:

"Your departure is, then, quite decided on? You spoke of it as only probable."

"Reason bids me go," answered Cléguérac. "But we shall see each other again—many times."

"Ah!" cried she, "I think I could better bear to see you go to-day. I have experience of last days and hours passed with people and in places that I loved."

She had endeavored to resume her sewing, but two great big tears, rolling down her cheeks, fell slowly on her new dress. Poor dress! What good to her henceforward? Nevertheless Irene, without affectation wiping away the shining spots, had no regret for her little gold watch. Those days of happiness that had just passed, she would try and resuscitate before the fatal hour of departure.

"If you weep I shall never be able to go."

Irene lifted her eyes at these words, and saw Maurice's figure bent in distress at the agony whose cause and remedy alike he knew so well! A ray of purest joy illumined her lovely countenance, like an apparition of sunshine at night. If men only knew the power at certain moments of certain words to calm, console, and fortify a woman!

"Go without fear," cried she. "I know now that you will not forget the little sister you leave among the northern snows. Besides, you can hardly give

a passing thought to 'The Hermitage' without being reminded at the same time of the 'Gray House.' Apropos, who will overlook your business?"

"I count on asking your good father to undertake the task."

"My father!" cried she, with shining eyes.

She experienced a new joy. Her father in Maurice's place! What a bond betwixt them and between the absent one and her! One might have thought she had just heard that the traveller would nevermore leave her presence. She herself began to discuss plans for the voyage, of which, in truth, Cléguérac was not thinking much just then. They spoke of New York.

"You will see your cousin?" asked Irene.

"Assuredly. You know, then, he is now in New York?"

Maurice learned, for the first time, that the viscount had told his entire life and history to Irene von Oberkorn. But if the young Parisian had thought to dazzle his new confidante, he had gone the wrong way about it. Irene judged him with a severity the young hero, in all probability, would not have understood if he had guessed it. On the contrary, she had no adjective tender enough when she spoke of Mademoiselle Montdauphin.

"You will see her at Paris?" she asked Maurice.

"From one point of view, I should like to, from another I should have a certain dread. What should I say to her? After all, I fear she must have been imprudent."

"Imprudent to trust herself to the plighted word of the man she adores?"

There was so much indignant surprise in this exclamation that Maurice dared not explain his meaning further. As he kept silence, Irene asked him:

"If you were in your friend's place, would you act as he is taking steps to act?"

"No," said he gravely.

"But who knows? Possibly you have a betrothed yourself in France?"

"I have a betrothed nowhere," answered Cléguérac, "in France no more than anywhere else."

This phrase, resting on the ground like a tennis-ball that no one cares to take up, finished the conversation for that day.

Cléguérac put himself steadfastly to harness, forcing himself to think of one thing alone, that he had only five days before him during which to prepare for his absence.

During that time, Baron Oberkorn, who was in hiding in a corner of his house so as to give Maurice time to accomplish his task, reappeared before his daughter, trembling with anxiety. Irene regarded him with her clairvoyant eyes, and understood at once that he knew all. She showed but little of what was passing in her heart, but, running to her father, took the old man's head between her hands and kissed his forehead.

"Let us love each other dearly, father!" she said in a firm but sorrowful voice.

"Are you afraid my tenderness may not suffice you?" sighed the baron, convulsively embracing her.

"Oh, no, indeed. Far, far from that. I have only one fear, that you should cease to love me," answered she.

Her gaze, apparently troubled with some faint or far-off apparition, recalled a look that he had sen in other eyes, eyes at that hour closed forever-more.

XI.

MAURICE DE CLÉGUÉRAC seemed to wake up precisely at the hour when he ought to be falling asleep; so he thought as he found himself stretched out on his berth in the sleeping-car from Wabigoon. For the first time for nearly a week he was able to think, and, for the first time, permitted a certain inner voice, hitherto silenced by force of will, to put the question:

"Why are you going away?"

He had not earlier asked himself why he was going, simply because he had willed to go, and he knew that will, like virtue, plays a high game in certain cases to be looked at doubtingly. The mania for analysis is no better and no worse for the government of peoples than for individuals. That is why, since analysis is king in modern romance, good people are so rarely to be read about.

A thing that proves Maurice had done well in not interrogating himself on the previous days is that, just now, his own resolution to go away astounded him, still more so the putting of it into practice. But he was too tired in body and spirit to push the reaction further. His sleeping-car was rolling Atlanticward through the frosty night; at the end of a few hours the motion of the train stupefied him to sleep.

He woke with daybreak. A great sadness seemed to load him down, that irritated him more than a rainy day succeeding a party of pleasure. Joy only should have filled his soul; every minute or two brought him a mile nearer France. It would have been a task of Hercules for him to be joyous. He could only keep thinking that he was going further and further from "The Hermitage" and its neighborhood. Soon he began to think only of Irene. With love. In justice—hardly. But with heavy melancholy.

Nevertheless Fräulein von Oberkorn had gone through their last interview, even the one in which they said good-by, without allowing a complaint, an avowal, a tear, hardly even a sigh to escape her. But this unmurmuring resignation, dolorous and sublime privilege of the races of the north and east, now greatly troubled Maurice, as it has troubled so many readers of Tolstoï, with a sharp, vibrating, passionate sensation of rebellion. Those great blue eyes pitilessly pursued him with a look in which no bitterness concealed the brand of grief. For sixty hours of forced reverie the look in those eyes burned into his. At parting he could have shown himself an honest man; had he not proved a cruel one? An exclamation whose masculine egotism he did not realize came constantly to his lips:

"Ah! why did I ever know her?"

He hoped that a meeting with Alain would cause him to forget this anxious complicated train of thought. But, to tell the truth of things, the two

cousins were discontented, disenchanted with each other; no mutual sympathy would flow on such a scene.

As for Alain, one would have said he had never lived, and never reckoned to live, outside of Fifth Avenue.

Only to see him, quite the Parisian still in general style, but with a studied note of American loudness, Maurice was ready to avow that the viscount carried the French name high in fashionable circles. The schedule of his exploits was far from giving the lie to his good fortune. He had made very many friends among young ladies of good society, that is to say, provided their fathers totalled their fortunes by five million dollars or over. He anticipated a winter painfully overdone with invitations.

"You count on passing the winter in New York?"

This question, whose significance he understood, hardly seemed to please the viscount. He responded with some slight acerbity, in the tone of a man who has made up his mind to deal with a delicate subject and not revert to it.

"My father placed this *ultimatum* before me: either not to re-enter France or to enter it on my word of honor that I had forever renounced those dreams of the future——"

"Dreams?" emphasized his cousin.

"Let us not play on words. By remaining in New York I take the only intelligent line of conduct. My father, sooner or later, will tire of pay-

ing the expenses of the war; that is to say, the expenses of the voyage."

"The more so as you choose the most compendious of encampments," remarked Maurice, pointing to the fittings and hangings of one of the most ruinously-expensive hotels in America.

Alain half closed his eyes with a merry smile, sat back in his rocker, and said, surrounding himself with a luxurious cloud of Turkish tobacco:

"I should be silly to pass a good thing by. But if you will promise not to betray me, I will tell you one of the drollest things. I am getting in debt. In New York! I, who never seriously attempted to run up accounts in Paris."

"Yes, it *is* rather comical," agreed Cléguérac, without much thought of laughing. "Getting into debt? May one ask why or for whom?"

"Aha! for Gladys Pauvell. What do you think?"

"For Gladys Pauvell?" repeated Maurice, hardly able to believe his ears.

The Viscount de Lavandien burst into a hearty laugh at this virtuous interjection.

"Ah, cousin, there's a bit of sentiment that smacks of the Great North West a mile off. Though it is not the first time you have been in New York. Good Heavens! I admit that Gladys compromises me a little, she takes possession of me, she monopolizes me. She invites me constantly to dinner at her parents' house. In reason I return her civilities. You haven't the least idea how much a simple *tête-à-tête* dinner costs at Delmonico's."

"No. But I cannot understand any better how you can return the civility of the elder Pauvells by dining alone with the daughter in a restaurant."

"Milksop! fancy if I had to invite the whole family. There are eight of them. But the other seven do not count. Three-quarters of the time they know I am invited by Gladys solely in order that I should be seen at the table. But do not think I get off with an occasional dinner for two. This young person simply adores picnics, and it is I, generally, who am her cavalier. Ruinous, absolutely ruinous, these picnics. The carriage and pair—lucky when it is not a yacht—flowers, champagne, musicians for a dance. One has not time to count one's bank-bills as they fly. Over and above picnics, there is the theatre; often both kinds of amusement the same day. Or, say we go to the ball. A carriage for the night is the necessary thing—one hundred francs. As for bouquets, there is no rule. Do you know that in one season the florists of New York make as much money as those of London and Paris put together?"

"On my honor, no," said Maurice.

"Well, as for me, I know it by experience. In brief, excellent cousin of mine, when you see my father, try to prepare him gently for my—revenge."

"Your revenge?"

"Yes. My father thwarts me in my inclinations. I strike him in his pocket. He exiles me. I will impoverish him. Dear Simone! they say you are too poor. Trot out your bank-notes and coupons

for Gladys Pauvell's fine eyes, who has millions of dollars. They are afraid I should dance with you —twenty louis for each evening of cotillons with the pretty American. They would prevent me from giving you a two-sou posy of violets—well, Gladys loves orchids and shall have them. Do you understand my scheme of vengeance?"

"It is exquisitely refined. One thing astonishes me, however, and it is this—who procures you the money?"

The viscount stopped his rocker, and, lowering his voice as though some indiscreet ear might overhear them, said:

"It is extremely simple. Pauvell is my medium, but he is also a banker. It is he who negotiates all my father's American business. From that to negotiating mine, there is but one step."

"And he has paid up?"

"With a facility that did him honor. But, on the contrary, when I am forced to liquidate, I foresee a much less enjoyable quarter of an hour before me."

"You will see that all will go well," answered Maurice, looking at his watch. "But I must leave you now to attend to a little business. My vessel sails to-morrow."

At the same instant a hotel servant approached Lavandien.

"A visitor for monsieur in the ladies' saloon."

"It can only be Gladys," said Alain. "I should like you to see her. Do you mind?"

"Well, I must confess this young person interests me very much."

"Why?" asked the viscount, turning.

"Simply because I have the honor to be your cousin," answered Cléguérac evasively.

By a very maze of corridors and staircases they reached a sort of boudoir having a separate entrance on a side street. On walls hung with pale blue damask were hung pictures of inestimable value by modern masters, in gorgeous frames, behind plate glass so thick they seemed like aquarelles. Each of these masterpieces bore a tablet with the name of the painter, the subject, and, most imposing of all, the colossal price paid for the acquisition of the canvas, a custom that false modesty alone will long prevent from coming into vogue in France. Yet what a precious guide is such arithmetic for half-educated admiration!

Before the mantel-piece, which seemed to bend beneath its weight of bronze, Gladys was standing with one dainty foot on the fender of the open fireplace. She was of medium height, admirably proportioned, really pretty, with that evident but, in truth, attractive hot-house look that eight out of ten wealthy American beauties possess. Her toilette, not in faultless taste, but interesting, was hardly in unison with the hour and the place. One would have said a millionaire Parisienne of the middle classes, somewhat eccentric, coming from a wedding at Saint-Philippe. But Gladys had only

come out to take the air and shop as the spirit might move her.

"Good-day," she said, shaking hands with her friend Lavandien. "I was passing by the Windsor, and came in to see if you were here, and have a cup of tea with you. They keep the best *caviare* here in New York."

Alain ordered the necessary refreshments, then he presented Cléguérac.

"I am so glad to see you," she said, with a hand-shake like her previous one. "The viscount makes my head spin with stories of the Great North West. And, you know, we are brought up from children to think that a prairie farmer eats without a fork, hardly ever changes his clothes, and sleeps in his boots."

"When he is fortunate enough to possess boots," emphasized Maurice, with perfect seriousness.

"Good," said Gladys, having examined her new acquaintance. "There are exceptions to every rule. But," pointing to Alain, "what idea did this young man take into his head to remain a month in the desert—what eccentricity!"

Maurice understood that Miss Pauvell was unaware of even the existence of a rival. Without looking at his cousin, who was beginning to look rather anxious, he answered:

"The whim of a tourist who wishes to see everything there is to be seen in a country, the ugly things as well as the beautiful. But, on taking

stock, our friend Lavandien had far too good taste not to come back to the beautiful."

"Nobody like a Frenchman for dexterity in turning compliments. I hope you make a long stay in New York."

"Alas! what should a prairie farmer do in the metropolis? I sail to-morrow, and even now I must leave you in order to choose my cabin on the *Savoie*."

"Nonsense. One of the bell-boys of the Windsor would make a better choice than you could."

Cléguérac insisted, saying he had other business.

"Well, you will come and dine this evening at our house. I shall be enchanted. I will invite one of my lady friends to insure a flirtatory equilibrium. Eight o'clock; say you will come."

At eight o'clock Maurice, escorted by Alain, mounted the steps that led to the Pauvell front door. They traversed a vestibule of medium size all glittering with new bronzes; then a first saloon, free of all furniture, that was kept for dancing; then another, cumbered with costly rugs. At last they came to the family sitting-room, where were present not only Gladys, but Father Pauvell and Mother Pauvell, and five young Pauvells of different sexes, whose ages varied from nine to seventeen. These personages, especially the younger ones, were talking together with a great chatter, and hardly turned their heads till the moment Gladys chose to introduce the new guest. Cléguérac received seven separate hand-shakes in

seven separate styles. When he had gone the rounds of presentation, Florence Kennedy, one of Gladys' best friends, who had fortunately been at liberty, made her appearance with a mighty rustling of satins and silks. Perhaps she would hardly have caused a saint's downfall by her beauty, too violet-like to be suggestive, but she would, by contrast, have killed a dozen of our most refined belles' toilettes by her dress. True, she had herself robed in Philadelphia, but we do not as yet appreciate the growing superiority of American costumes. Look out for surprises in the future.

Gladys presented Cléguérac to her friend; then they passed into the dining-room, whose table was almost invisible under an infinity of objects, looking like white metal from their sturdy obsolete shapes, like silver by their glow and glitter. A network of living creepers interlaced with orchids sprang from the midst of all, and festooned around a great cage of frosted glass containing a nest of incandescent lights. This luxurious screen rendered one half the guests completely invisible to the other. At one side of the table they might be commemorating a funeral, without attracting the notice of the opposite moiety. Maurice, who had promised himself to observe, for future guidance, the mutual attitude of Alain and Gladys, would not even have been able to say, when all were seated, whereabouts in New York those interesting young people at that moment were.

To tell the truth, his neighbor left him little leis-

ure to give to the rest of the human race. Florence belonged to the category of American exuberants. After the soup, Cléguérac knew already that she was quite a general; that Ciwillier was the only place in Paris where one can get a decent lunch; that X. had made a miss-fire of his Academy picture last year, and that she had traversed the ocean eleven times, which uneven number indicated as well as explained that Mademoiselle Kennedy had found herself in France at the era when a certain event first called her home to America.

"You have known the French from indeed a very early age," said Maurice to his neighbor. "What do you think of them?"

"As a nation as a whole," answered she, without hesitation, "I put them first in the front flight—after us. In the individual, with some exceptions, I find two grave drawbacks: they take flirtation too seriously and marriage too lightly."

"As for flirtation," protested Cléguérac, "fear nothing from me; I am one of the exceptions."

"Oh, you! You have travelled," said she. "But you have not said how you would behave as a husband."

"Detestably; so let me be held up as a warning. I should be the misery of the lady who married me."

"I thank you for warning me in good time. But the precaution is superfluous. Twenty-five years of age, I am invulnerable."

"Who knows?"

"It is so, I assure you. I have decided it myself.

I have the weakness to think that among all earthly creatures warmed by the sun in his twenty-four-hour race, there is no happier mortal than Florence Kennedy."

"It seems you, also, are among the exceptions," answered Maurice, who suddenly saw before him, by sheer force of contrast, Irene's pale face as they bade each other good-by.

He passed his hand over his forehead, and, too much master of himself to transmit his melancholy to his neighbor, returned:

"Well, happily, I also am invulnerable."

"Who knows?" asked she in her turn, with one of those pretty glances which we sometimes call "wicked."

"Oh, I do not underestimate the danger I am running," said Maurice, laughing. "Anybody but myself, in the position I occupy at this moment, would be a lost man. But I have here, over my heart, a talisman that takes away all fear."

"Your sweetheart's portrait?"

"No. A steamer ticket for Havre. To-morrow, at this very hour, I shall already be unable to see the lights of Sandy Hook."

"Fie, coward! But do not think yourself forever saved. People go—but they come back—and then—— Behold your friend; that poor young man had the energy to make a campaign against the Indians, to cross the Rocky Mountains. What serves him now that valor of a day? I think the Parisian ladies can put on mourning dresses."

Cléguérac felt his heart stabbed once more. He was thinking now not of Irene, but of that other young girl whom he did not know, and whose duty it was to prepare her to put mourning on her illusions.

At sight of his sad look Florence Kennedy thought he was continuing the jest.

"Come, come," said she, "take courage. We know how to be generous from time to time. After all, we may well take pity on one victim out of two."

At these words she followed Mrs. Pauvell, who was regaining the drawing-room with Gladys and the younger children, leaving the men to claret, or to those delicious Havana cigars so ill-known in our country. When the two parties rejoined each other, it was Gladys who seized on Alain's friend, probably after the safe counsels of the viscount. They talked together seriously for an hour, without allusion to the future. Only, as they were about to part, Miss Pauvell said to Cléguérac:

"You know me pretty well by now; while, as for me, I have known you quite a long time. Perhaps you will be able to give us a day."

He could not but acknowledge that Gladys was worthy of sympathy and even friendship. Besides, she seemed quite sedate by the side of Florence Kennedy. Her gravest fault was, if she only knew it, that she had come in second.

However that may be, regaining the Windsor on foot with his cousin, Maurice spoke neither of Flor-

ence nor of Gladys, nor the opulent hospitality of the Pauvells. Irene von Oberkorn and her recent illness were the subjects of their talk. As to the convalescence and the many incidents that had preceded and followed, Cléguérac, be it understood, spoke no word. Alain, on his part, made no sort of mention of Simone, which angered the Canadian.

"After all," said the latter, turning on his bed to try to get to sleep, "I am not the guardian of Mademoiselle de Montdauphin's happiness. Thank Heaven, I am charged with nobody's happiness."

Hardly had this sigh of egotistic satisfaction escaped his breast, when he saw Irene's lovely eyes seeking his in mute reproach, as though to say to him:

"Unkind! On whom, then, if not on you, depends my happiness?"

XIII.

General de Berdons passed two hours every day reading the papers in his library, the double doors being rigorously closed, so that his daughter, whose salon was adjacent, might not hear him swear. Occasions for swearing are not wanting nowadays when we read newspapers, above all if one has made a hobby-horse of honor, justice, right, good sense, and grammar, which was the case with the general of division, retired two years earlier, without counting that there ran in his veins the blood of the Cévennes. But all causes us to think that the old warrior rather sought than avoided this daily craze, for the faintest oath was never heard from his mouth after the hour of ten in the morning save on the days when he felt the working of the bullet still within his frame. Evidently this *ante-meridian* disgorgement set him at liberty for the rest of the twenty-four hours, and even placed him in a position not to shock Marie de Berdon's pink delicate ears with a too military word, whose mother he had now replaced with the ponderous tenderness of a paladin watching over a princess.

The general had almost gone through his course, one November morning, when the servant an-

nounced Monsieur Maurice de Cléguérac. His surprise was such that four or five oaths escaped him that had been apparently lurking in his system, fortunately before Cléguérac's actual appearance.

A quarter of an hour, at least, was necessary in order to renew the acquaintance. The young man related that he had embarked at Havre the evening before; that his first course had been direct to his old chief, whom, he said, he found just the same spite of his "civil" overcoat; that Mademoiselle Marie by that time ought to have grown into a very lovely young lady. Then came the inevitable question:

"What in the dickens was he doing there? Was it a leave-taking or a retreat?"

"Ah! my dear general, if you could only enlighten me!" answered Maurice. "We will talk it all over, for I like best to give you all at once the theme of the manœuvre, as we used to call it in the dear old days. For simple nobodies, I am on a visit of amusement, and to set in order my affairs. But it is to you, and to you only, I am paying this visit. Faith, I feel I can no more explain it to you—— I must try, nevertheless. Over yonder I have a neighbor. That neighbor has a daughter."

"With whom you are in love?"

"Alas, it is she—I speak to you as to my confessor—it is she who has got it into her head that I am worthy of her affections. I hasten to avow that she has almost no other choice."

"A good girl, the little one?"

"Good, pretty, gracious, devoted, intelligent, of the old nobility, and not yet seventeen."

"Aha! after all I had read, I did not think the prairie had such inhabitants. And you feel no attachment for this young person?"

"I felt none when I used to see her every day. Since I can no longer see her, I begin to think of her. But I cannot tell you exactly how I feel. A sense of anxious pity, it seems likely."

"Well, my boy, marry her first, and analyze your feelings for her at leisure. Has she any money?"

"Not a sou."

"The devil! And how is it with you?"

"I have nothing to complain of at present, nor any reason to despair of the future."

"Well then, my friend, if you have only to stretch out your hand to obtain a good woman—— I assure you such are rare, at least in Paris. I only know one, but that one is not for your fine eyes. If my son-in-law lived as much as across the street, I should find it too far. Reflect well. Suppose you waited till your fortune was made. It would take at least another ten years. You would be forty—which is too old. You would be weary of the strife, you would have lost touch of the world, and you would have lost, in solid happiness, the ten best years of life. So, my brave Maurice, wed your litle sweetheart without delay. I only see *one* sacrifice on your part—a financial one."

"There is another," said Maurice, his eyes fixed

on the general. "Her father, the Baron d'Oberkorn, is a Prussian gentleman."

"The devil run away with you!" said M. de Berdons, crushing his journal between his hands, and rising from his seat.

But this impetuous movement drew a cry of pain from him, followed by an explosive oath too voluminous to be incorporated in the text of an ordinary novel. He had "felt that bullet."

"A Prussian beggar-girl," he groaned, taking hold of the mantel-piece in order to regain his seat.

"My poor general, it is not *my* fault," said Cléguérac.

"Evidently it is not your fault. But, frankly, you are one of the uncanniest of friends. One day you tread on a gentleman's toes—it proves to be your chief in one department. You kill your adversary in a duel. And then you are obliged, as things turn out, to feed the family. Then you take a fancy for the only woman, perhaps, there is within your purview for espousal; she turns out a Prussian."

"But, my good general, had I wished to proceed with the affair, I should not be here."

"Good luck to you! But would you have departed had you been certain that things ran no risk of going farther? I do not say you did wrong in coming away. What I do say, and I repeat it, is that you are playing for high stakes. Look you, my boy, I know you. I have followed your career. I have seen you come back from a year's travel

without having forgotten your account with a poor devil who, after all, had not done much to you. And you wish to make me believe that in three months you could forget a girl who adores you, and whom—— You did not look at yourself in a looking-glass, just now, when you were speaking."

"I am not much accustomed to looking-glasses," said Maurice, smiling.

"Well, my warrior, I strongly advise you to renew the habit—morally, at all events. Survey yourself; study yourself. I have the intimate conviction that the strongest men do not act as they would wish to when love is in question. Only, unless a man is an imbecile or a criminal, he must know where he is going, in order to act logically."

"General, I will see you again often. You are a good doctor, and I am assured that the Parisian ladies are charming remedies."

"Yes, make a pretence to laugh!" said M. de Berdons, shrugging his shoulders. "You have the agreeable alternative of either caring for a lady here you cannot marry, because she would refuse to go over yonder, or loving a woman over yonder who——"

Brusquely the old man broke off, and sat down again in his chair with more precaution than he had taken in rising. As he did not seem to be willing to finish his sentence, Cléguérac remarked:

"You stopped, I think, at the very moment when the conversation was becoming interesting."

"I should like to see you less interested, my dear

Maurice," he replied. "What would you have? In France, for one reason or another, partiotism has become sentimental. In the days of Fontenoy the gentlemen of the opposing armies played cards and caroused together on the eve of battle. The next day they met as brave men meet. To-day we do not even wish to breathe the perfume of a flower that had its nurture on the enemy's soil. What difference do you see between these two kinds of patriots?"

"But little, intrinsically," said Cléguérac, "since we kill each other now more quickly and easily than the warriors of the olden time. Only, formerly, it was two aristocracies that were fighting each other; for even the simple soldier of yore, separated by choice or chance from the rest of the nation, was, in a fashion, an aristocrat. To-day it is two nations who meet to fight."

"Good, but the aristocracy of to-day has one privilege: that of setting an example to the people. For the rest we know, you and I who are of the trade, that we shall never retake Alsace and Lorraine with sentiment. But if we criticise sentiment, we shall be just as well advised as the husband who mocks at his wife for going to mass. I think that men like ourselves ought to bow to this sentimentality of patriotism."

"Conclusion: it is a crime to marry a German woman."

"Not at all. But it would be better not to marry a German. And, notice here, my dear fellow, that

honor, as we understand it, consists not only in avoiding crimes, but in doing the best deeds we can perform. All this, let it be an understood thing, is between ourselves. And now, let us pay court to my daughter, so that she may invite us to breakfast."

Mademoiselle de Berdons, a little slender lady, fine and flexible as the blade of a Spanish sword, merits a place in the highly interesting category of pretty plain ladies. Her complexion of almost gypsy brownness was yet exceedingly clear; her nose pronounced and prominent withal, not aquiline; mouth a little too large, the philosopher's and orator's mouth, formed a somewhat striking ensemble, whose imagined want of harmony became a sparkling unison when lighted up by two magnificent eyes.

Maurice had known her as a child. He found her a young woman now, after an absence of many years. For the first time in their lives the words "mademoiselle," and "monsieur," came to their lips. But the transition was accomplished on both sides with extreme facility, and the general, whose paternal fondness was by no means a stranger to certain of the pangs of jealousy, was reassured by the first minutes of their intercourse.

The conversation, besides, quickly took on more of the character of an "interview," and one might have supposed that Marie de Berdons was gathering materials for an article on the North West, especially upon "The Hermitage" farm and manufactories. During breakfast she made an incidental

allusion to the viscount's sojourn on the prairie. Cléguérac was certain he had not mentioned the count's name, for he had calculated to steer clear of all distressing subjects. Much astonished at seeing this young Parisienne so very well informed, he asked:

"Has Lavandien's visit to 'The Hermitage' then made such a noise?"

Mademoiselle de Berdons blushed lightly, and bit her lips.

"I did not say this visit made a noise," answered she. "Somebody spoke of it before me, and I felt interested, the traveller not being by any means unknown to some of my particular friends."

Immediately she turned the conversation, and questioned Cléguérac upon his society projects. The latter assured the lady he intended to go out a good deal.

"But," added he, "for the moment I am obliged to do like the poet who remained in bed all day for lack of a coat."

"Well," ordered Mademoiselle de Berdons, "see that you have a coat to put on within eight days. You will receive an invitation to a ball."

"May one ask at whose house?"

"The Countess Gravino's."

"But I do not know this countess. Is she old, young——"

"She is about the same age as her husband's nobility—that is to say, she is not wrinkled," put in the general.

"What matters the Countess Gravino's personality to you? The essential thing for you is that you will dance the cotillion at her house—with me."

"'What odds what flask, as long as one is tipsy,'" cried Maurice, laughing. "But now I leave you to run to my tailor's."

When Cléguérac had gone, M. de Berdons grumbled without looking at his daughter:

"You know he returns to America in March. He has yet ten years of prairie-life before him."

"Ah, how unhappy I am!" cried the merry girl with a deep dramatic sigh. "I felt myself ready to love——"

Then, breaking into laughter, she embraced her father, regained her apartment, and covered two pages feverishly with writing, like one who hastens to transmit great news. The envelope, sent off within the hour, bore the name of Mademoiselle de Montdauphin.

XIV.

THE Countess Gravino, previously presented to the reader, possessed fortune and worldly knowledge in equal proportions, which is paying her perspicacity no paltry compliment. To this was joined the personal advantage of high birth. In her drawing-rooms, in addition to the pretty amenities of the old régime, which the hostess thought it worth while still to preserve, you were endowed with the extended liberties and charters of the new. Somebody once compared her salon to the great fair at Nijni-Novgorod because the two ends of the earth have there a meeting and a resting-place.

Maurice, conducted by Mademoiselle de Berdons, with the general as whipper-in, arrived in good time—that is to say, at 11 o'clock in the evening—at the Hotel Gravino, on the night of the ball. His invitation had been prompt; it was no common copperplate of pretentious society, but an autograph card from the countess, containing two specially familiar lines. Seeing Cléguérac enter, without ceremony she extended her hand, and, chasing from her lips the stereotyped smile of the lady of the house, who has to bow to hundreds, she scanned his face with eyes that seemed to know him.

"It was very naughty of you to leave your name

yesterday without asking whether I was at home or not," said she. "I should have received *you*."

"Before being presented I could hardly be bold enough——"

"We shall see," said the countess, lifting her magnificent shoulders, from which her dress was suspended only by ribbons.

"You would signify that a wild man of my species is not held by the rules of ordinary society?"

"We will say that that was what I meant. You will know some day soon."

Some more guests arrived. The countess took her leave of Maurice for the moment:

"To-night I am the victim of the mob. I shall not be able to say three words to you But come to-morrow at 5 o'clock, and we will have a long, long talk."

"Adieu, papa!" the general's daughter was saying. "You know we sup seated, here, at little tables. Be good to yourself. From time to time I will send Cléguérac for the news."

Maurice, hearing these words, opened his eyes wide. The general grumbled some answer, the ever-increasing crowd cut short all protestation.

"Left all alone?" asked the Canadian, carried on, like his companion, by the current.

"Yes and no," said she. "Look."

They found themselves in a large and lofty chamber, specially reserved for the gambols of the younger ones, who came here to devote themselves to conversation and the dance, under the eyes only

of heaven and the musicians. However—and Marie de Berdons directed Célguérac's attention to this important detail—of the three doors which connected the room with the neighboring salon, only two were closed. The third, with both wings open, was only barred by a line of rose-colored ribbon, stretched from one side to the other, so as to show that the elderly gentlemen sequestered in the "night asylum" were simply prisoners on parole.

"This is something new to me," said Maurice. "It makes one think of the glazed partitions between two compartments of the same carriage, to prevent monsieur the assassin from working too much at his ease."

Marie de Berdon shook her head and replied profoundly:

"Oh, I assure you, there is very little assassination nowadays. It is rather our money than our lives that is menaced; but we have the examples of former days to put us on our guard."

Cléguérac, more and more surprised, observed the tableau before him with all his eyes.

Underneath the light prodigally cast by many dozen Edison lamps, groups formed exclusively of young men and young ladies were gathering in every corner. Hands were clasped as calmly as though at a club; conversation flowed on a footing of quiet equality; people were laughing without making a racket over it, amusing each other without exaggeration. In vain Maurice passed in re-

view the ladies' faces, thinking to find a friend or two of his boyhood long since married.

"Where are the young married ladies?" asked Maurice of his guide.

"Where are they? At the theatre, at serious evenings, at elegant dinners—even some of them in bed. This evening's ball is what we call a white one. When these ladies meet us in society, the world is theirs. The gentlemen prefer it, naturally."

"Why 'naturally'?"

"Look you, monsieur: do you take me for a goose it is droll to hear quacking? Or have you never been in the Parisian world?"

"I have led two or three dozen cotillons, but it was so long ago. You would not believe me if I told you that at that era a mother exacted of a young man that he should be introduced before dancing with her daughter."

"Oh! and we could only dance within a certain circle, whose centre is the maternal sofa. Then, what conversations! A young man would marry us after dancing with us during two winters—and he would not know us."

"Whereas, now," answered Maurice, thinking of Lavandien, "this same young man dances and talks with you absolutely at his ease, knows you to the tips of the fingers—and does not marry you."

"No, certainly. But I pity you, from my heart, for having no illusions left."

"You speak like papa, and serious people. No

illusions! The words are always on their lips. Well, is it our fault if we were born at the end of the century and not the beginning? As for me, I confess right out: I find myself happy as I am, and I decline to become miserable. Either you shall bury me in the winding-sheet of some creature old enough to be my mother, or I will marry somebody who will love me and deserve that I should love him. At least I have the illusion that such a one exists. Where? We may never meet. About that I know nothing. But patience: once more I am reconciled with my lot, and I assure you one can amuse one's self very well in the world without illusions."

In the mean time the "Boston" was in progress. Maurice's name was inscribed on the first line of Marie de Berdons' programme; and, presently, on beholding a man of thirty return to the uses of adolescence, more than one frown was seen around the rooms. But Maurice, after a stay of many years on the American continent, danced as well as anybody. Not only did Mademoiselle de Berdons never seem to tire, but that malicious young person, in the intervals, recounted, for the benefit of whoever might be able to overhear, that the new-comer possessed a domain in Canada as large as the canton of Beauce. Which was all that was wanted to make him the fashion. Toward 1 o'clock in the morning, half a dozen dancers had passed underneath the rose-colored ribbon to inform their mothers in the "night asylum" that it would be a

good thing to have a certain M. de Cléguérac pay them a visit—"the tall, slender man who resembled an officer of chasseurs (the ideal of the day), though not yet decorated."

Unhappily two people attacked the Maurice pedestal which the rest were so assiduously building. One was General de Berdons, who, questioned as to his daughter's new friend, loyally declared that the handsome dancer, as regarded fortune, had only expectations, and those not of the best. The other was the Countess Gravino, who, more than once, following her guest with her eyes without the latter's knowledge, appeared to have determined, for some reason or other, that he should not be allowed to make his way too fast—outside her own house.

During the truce that precedes the cotillon, the mothers passed the order of the day to their daughters:

"Nothing serious with your Monsieur de Cléguérac. Do you understand? Dance with him, if he amuses you; but do me the honor not to become in any way entangled."

After these salutary warnings, some of the young persons discovered that they had made certain clerical errors on their programmes. Poor Maurice profited by the opportunity to go and pay a visit to the general, who was sleeping like a gendarme, his eyes open, all the while feigning to talk with a neighbor not much more wide-awake than himself.

"Well, young man, have you been amusing yourself?"

"Prodigiously. I hear and see all sorts of extraordinary things. Just now a very distinguished-looking young gentleman said to his partner: 'Would you like my escort to the drinking-trough?' I fear I have yet a good deal to learn in the way of society small-talk. But I suppose it is indispensable."

"As for me, I envy my porter's lot, who is not obliged to let in his lodgers after midnight, and I say to that good lady there, almost in tears with fatigue, that they make fools of us when they oblige us to do a footman's duty. The real ones have the chance of taking a doze in a corner, or visiting a drinking-place across the way, while their exits are luxuriously perfumed with their mistress' cloaks. What are we doing here? Why do we not organize ourselves, as in the case of boarding-schools, into an omnibus service, to conduct the scholars home to their parents when the classes are over?"

"Having the honor of knowing you so little," said Cléguérac, "I am astonished at so much resignation on your part—though cloaked with irony."

"I am resigned. In the first place, I know my daughter's nature. With her it does not do to pass by a hair's breadth the permitted limit. And then, I may either take it or leave it. At the start, I am recalcitrant. I fortify myself in an arm-chair by the side of her and hold to my point. Do you know what always happens? The little one is left upon her chair—it is the order of the day. Twice

her dancing fellows come around, excusing themselves inasmuch as they have sprained their ankles. The world is a power. One may pass it by. But one must not try and be different from the world while in it."

At this instant Marie de Berdons appeared. She came to ascertain how her father was feeling, and at the same time to ask Maurice to join the cotillon she was forming.

"Will you not stay five minutes?" said the general.

"No," said his daughter gravely. "It would be bad form. And the dancing-room is by no means gay. It makes me think of the painting of 'The Summons of the Condemned during the Terror.' Let us save ourselves, monsieur. We have but to send for our chariot."

She flew away with her partner, throwing the general a smile which was equivalent to a kiss; and the old man sadly thought of the chariot that would come some day or other, soon, all flounced with white satin and lace, to take away his beloved daughter.

The cotillon would have been no new thing to Cléguérac, but for the strange scene and strange figures and faces. Each lady was provided beforehand with a beautiful bag containing fans painted by hand, tablets enriched with microscopic watches, garden hats, little cages holding some rare singing-bird. A lot of handsome canes, travelling-clocks, cigarette-cases, elegant knick-knacks, were distrib-

uted to the gentlemen. When these rare and costly presents had been distributed, the conductor of the cotillon passed to those who were unprovided with flowers, embroidered scarfs and other pretty things to bring out their neglected graces. But just then no less than twenty couples, suddenly overcome with fatigue, beat a retreat, to the profound amazement of Maurice. When he protested against this fashion of commerically-valuable souvenirs, his partner observed:

"What! you have ceased to be a philosopher. Do you not see that these useful presents for us stand in the stead of the pinch of ashes in mid-carnival: 'Remember, young marriageable lady, that love is nothing here below, and money everything.' Some such phrase I think I hear every time my partner puts five louis in my hand in the form of a fan or bit of jewelry."

"Heavens, how I pity you!" sighed Cléguérac.

"I am not to be pitied, because it seems I have a wedding-portion. By the way, does it ever happen, out on the prairie, that man falls in love with a girl for her beauty?"

"Perhaps," said Maurice.

And for several minutes he forgot the great Parisian fête, its toilettes, the music, the great hot, shining, perfumed room itself, to see, in a little cottage half-hid by pallid snow in another hemisphere, two eyes that he felt fixed on his, notwithstanding the miles of land and prairie that rolled between them.

At the same instant another look, not accustomed to remain unanswered when it spoke, vainly enveloped the dreamer with their influences, eloquent of less mysterious sentiments. The cotillon was over; the couples streamed steadily supperward. The Countess Gravino's superb fan touched Maurice on the shoulder. He turned, relinquishing Mademoiselle de Berdons' arm. The countess said to him:

"You have bored yourself to death, which might have been foreseen. An eagle invited into a dovecote. But the idea was none of mine; I should never have dared—it was one of this young person's. To make up, it is not too much to offer you a place at my particular table."

"Our table—is already organized," said Mademoiselle de Berdons resolutely.

The countess insisting, Marie de Berdons whispered four words in her ear.

"Always politic," answered the mistress of the mansion. "In fine, my gentleman, since I cannot make you obey, even in my own house, do not forget that you are to pay me a visit to-morrow, or, rather, this very evening. *Au revoir*, man of steel. May my champagne help you to forget your fights with buffaloes and Indians."

"Your friend actually wishes to make me out a living illustration from Gustave Aymard," said Maurice, laughing.

"I do not know what she wants to do with you,"

answered Mademoiselle de Berdons, "but everybody to his rights. For the moment you belong to me. One hour more and you will be free."

While speaking, the authoritative young lady was conducting Maurice to *her* table, where she placed him on the right. Between the general and his daughter he beheld seated a very beautiful young lady he had already remarked. He had even asked Marie de Berdons who the unknown was, but in the flurry of the cotillon his words obtained but scanty notice. Unfolding his napkin, he renewed the question. "I will tell you presently," was the response.

Cléguérac's neighbor was "a daughter of the gods, divinely tall," which is either a calamity or a glory, according to whether she is also "divinely fair." Still incomplete in certain contours, in attitudes and gestures girlishly not yet quite "strong," she was yet put together with all the finished graces of a piece of statuary. To follow out the simile, this superb creature gave at first the vaguely chilling impression of a fine work of art for which it is not easy to find a suitable place in ordinary houses.

"When this chef-d'œuvre fills out she will be worthy of a king. But lover-kings, in these our days, are rare."

Beholding this lovely face, whose smile, frequently forced, disappeared without fading away, with a brusque show of charming dimples, one

might suppose that the young girl herself understood all the difficulties of the problem she presented. But the no less sudden flashing-up of the joy of life, the triumphant return of a smile as radiant as a springtide morning soon showed that she counted for its solution on her beauty, on her star, and on her king.

Meanwhile, Marie de Berdons, who presided, had turned the conversation to the Great North West. Cléguérac recounted certain adventures, and depicted his prairie-life with modesty and good sense. His mysterious neighbor on the right listened without looking at him, without eating, crumbling her bread with long pink fingers that some mysterious trembling seemed to agitate.

"What you miss, I should imagine, is a visitor now and then," said Mademoiselle de Berdons.

Cléguérac opened his mouth to answer that he had received precisely one the previous summer; but, mindful of the telegraphic catastrophe to the Wabigoon banquet, he became desirous of reconnoitering.

"Do you know Alain de Lavandien?" he asked evasively.

A general exclamation showed him that he was hemmed in by friends and acquaintances of the viscount. At the same time certain tell-tale looks were turned on Simone. But she had carried to her lips a cup, above which, as behind a mask, appeared only two more than half-veiled eyes.

"You have perhaps seen Alain in America?" said one of the young men.

"I left him," prudently answered Maurice, "in a fair way of learning English in New York."

"At college?"

"No: with a millionaire who transacts his business for him."

"I hope the millionaire has a daughter?"

"He has indeed—several. But Gladys Pauvell merits all attention, seeing the tender age of the others."

"A miracle!" said the unknown young man. "I always thought that Lavandien was no ordinary fellow. Whereabouts is he? At the conjugation of verbs or the conjunction?"

Maurice retorted, tempted, as often happens, by a catch-word:

"I think he is at the participles."

He stopped short at these words, at sight of his pretty neighbor's face. She had placed her hand upon her chin, and was looking strangely at Cléguérac. Concentrated anguish, profound pride, gave her at once a hard and heart-breaking aspect. The one who had spoken so inconsiderately trembled, first struck with a suspicion, then a dreadful certainty. Evidently it was Mademoiselle de Montdauphin in person who had been invited to sup by his side. An embarrassed silence reigned. Mademoiselle de Berdons, visibly vexed, but prepared with a new tactic, changed the conversation with

remarkable surety of touch. Maurice would have given a fortune to be back at "The Hermitage," and assumed such an unhappy air that his neighbor on the right took pity on him and was gracious, first with an effort, then of her own free will. They talked together till supper ended, studying each other, satisfied with each other, divining, perhaps, that a day would come when there should be something between them less hackneyed than a ball-room friendship. Neverthless Maurice was not a little astonished when the unknown, immediately on rising from the table, took his arm, and, directing him to the extremity of the hall where the "families" were supping, said in a tired voice:

"I wish to present you to my mother, the Marquise de Montdauphin."

The presentation was made; Maurice invited to come and take a cup of tea the very next evening, early, and in intimacy.

"Well, it is Simone," thought Cléguérac. "How beautiful she is! To love this superb creature—be loved by her, and fly because she is poor! Is it possible?"

Simone bid Cléguérac adieu with a sad and charming smile, as though she had fathomed his very thought. Soon he saw her descending the monumental staircase on her mother's arm. Her admirable head, aureoled with a veil of Oriental gauze, stood far above the crowd of fashionable girls. At the last step she turned, and again her eyes met the eyes of Alain's friend. Then she

mounted beside the corpulent marquise in a hired vehicle, awaiting—should it ever come—the carriage of the king!

Cléguérac returned home alone on foot; all alone apparently, but was walking in the midst of a troup of phantoms who disputed his reverie. Turn by turn he saw Irene Oberkorn, Gladys Pauvell, Florence Kennedy, Simone de Montdauphin, and bolder, more dangerous, more provoking than the others, the Countess Gravino, who seemed to hide beneath the snows of her superbly modelled figure, unknown abysses. True loves, false loves, silly loves, hopeless loves, all these vague forms of love, danced around him in disorder. He went to sleep with this question on his lips:

"Must we all love?"

XV.

MAURICE had three appointments on the following day: one on business in the morning, one of a somewhat uncertain character in the afternoon, one of a friendly nature in the evening. He could even foresee, by the sadness he had surprised in Simone de Montdauphin's eyes, that this third visit would bear a great resemblance to a charitable call. Unhappily he saw much less clearly what he could possibly say to calm or cure this sadness.

But let every hour bear its own anxiety. Cléguérac had first to talk beet-root and sugar refinery with a rich man slightly older than himself, his principal backer as regarded money, whom he had been not a little surprised, the evening before, to meet at the Countess Gravino's, and still more astonished to hear addressed as baron. Indeed, with his flickering eyes—not for want of frankness, but through nervousness—hesitating voice, ill-cut beard, and hair too long, Sigismund Versepuis less resembled a young seigneur than one of those mysterious guests whose inexplicable apparition suggests the question:

"What instrument will he play on presently?"

This young man played on an instrument which is the king of all—the keyboard of millions; and it

must be confessed he played exceedingly well. The deceased Versepuis, his father, had made a gigantic fortune by persuading the Parisians, under the Empire, and even under two presidents, that a bag of candied fruit or chocolate creams, in order to carry weight as a present, ought to come out of his shop. This clever man, besides, took the precaution to put up his products as women of the world set out their romances—under cover of a pseudonym, so that his own name Versepuis should not smell of trade.

Sigismund, son of the preceding, had inherited this fortune, in addition to the inestimable advantage that he had on the tips of his fingers the name and appearance of the fine gentlemen and ladies of the various social worlds. He had had occasion to hear them and see them, without being seen himself, thanks to an ingeniously-disposed trap, in the centre of which, for several years, he had registered orders and paid out money. Another circumstance, unknown to the public, had marvellously assisted him in worldly initiation. The house having undertaken to cater for the opera buffet, Sigismund, naturally, obtained the entry to the public foyer, from which by degrees he adventured into the green-room, then penetrated to the wings, and at last to the dancers' lobby. There he became the idol of the staff, thanks to his fabulous wealth of candies, for it was easier to hide the theft of caramels than that of napoleons. But he made some lucky meetings in this choregraphic paradise,

Always ready to bow, he never hesitated to receive a salutation, which might be useful to him after his entry into the world, after the sale of the paternal stock. By dint of seeing him taking mysterious packages out of his pocket, the opera subscribers took him for a man of consideration. More than one "protector" wrung his hand, for he was well spoken of in the directorial sanctum.

As for Versepuis, gifted with the memory of a recording angel, he knew all the subscribers not only by name, but by sight. At need, he could recollect what kind of dress they had worn, what friend had been in their box on such and such a first night. He thus avoided the disadvantage, more fatal in Paris than elsewhere, of going about like an unknown just tumbled from the moon. His weak side was a passion for nobility, a dangerous taste, inherited, doubtless, from his father, once the steward in a family already celebrated under the Valois, who was never tired of saying:

"You may say what you like. It is only the ancient aristocracy who know how to keep servants in their places, turn their back on their creditors, deceive their husbands, and ruin their wives, without hurting their feelings."

This preference of Sigismund for the privileged classes—reputed so—produced many complications in his destiny. The first was the regular acquisition and use of the title of baron for himself. The second was a passing intimacy with an old aristocrat, who, embarrassed in her circumstances, and quite

devoid of delicacy, less easy to satisfy than the dancers in the old days, was not to be put off with caramels. At last, tired of the frail and disingenuous sex, Sigismund cut out a path in financial enterprises which brought him into contact with not quite so charming a nobility, but one in whose company it was easier to limit one's risks. It was thus that he formerly became acquainted with Cléguérac, and became one of the largest stockholders in "The Hermitage" enterprises.

Maurice owed him a visit, and paid it, as we are about to see, on the day after the Gravino ball. The interview started on business points, on which Versepuis was certainly a past-master. The explanations, reports, and figures of the young colonist caused him a gentle surprise; not only was no more money demanded, but profits were admitted.

The interview, under such circumstances, could hardly fail to prove agreeable. Sigismund seemed to wish to fascinate, and indeed he showed such vast experience in industrial questions, so much grateful appreciation for Maurice's many efforts, so much discreet personal sympathy for himself, that it was easy to see these two men would probably become more closely connected. As they were about to part, Sigismund said, with a very natural air to his visitor:

"The Countess Gravino gives a lovely party?"

"Charming," answered Cléguérac. "I doubly enjoyed that of last evening; after years of exile, I have not lost my capacity of enjoyment."

"The most used-up of mortals would have envied you your place at supper," retorted Versepuis, bowing his guest out with excessive courtesy.

It was 5 o'clock when Maurice, with an agreeable emotion which reminded him of certain hours of youth, crossed the monumental threshold of the Hôtel Gravino. Thanks to those rapid manœuvres that distinguish well-kept houses, everything had reassumed its daily air in the stately, quiet mansion, everybody except the seductive mistress of the house. Her beautiful brown hair, hardly festooned with a fastener, after the fashion of the bather, her eyes voluptuously enlarged by a circle of *bistre*, her tint of hot-house pallor, white almost as a gardenia, showed that the fatigue of the ball was weighing heavily upon the countess. Mathilde was reposing on a long chair in her little salon. She was wrapped in a blazing wadded robe of saffron satin, toned down by beautiful black lace, which resembled less a boudoir costume than a ball dress. A *kimous*, whose stuff disappeared beneath the amazing draperies, snugly covered her feet. In the room breathed the faint odor of those Japanese pastilles which perfume the air without agitating the nerves, though not without a message to the senses. The rather large but melting hand that now touched his, dwelt on the young man's fingers as on fruit which one detaches from its stalk unwittingly, having but touched it. He sat down in a low fauteuil, at "the doctor's distance," judging, at first sight, that there was something unexpected

in the air, without prejudging whether wise or the reverse, but divining that he would shortly have to make a choice. Waiting, he regarded Mathilde attentively, who, with her eyes on the ceiling, seemed to endure the examination without displeasure, and accept without fear the chances of the alternative.

"Do not imagine," she said, at last, "that the custom of the house is to receive gentlemen as I receive you, that is to say, with an entire absence of coquetry pushed to the verge of negligence."

"O madame!" answered Cléguérac, smiling, "I ask no more. When it pleases you to receive me deign to maintain this absence still. I tremble at the idea of what would happen were you a coquette."

He spoke, perhaps, more seriously than this inoffensive remark inferred. The countess did not seem to approve of his reservation, and continued:

"Positively, this ball has broken me with fatigue. Just now, after my bath, I had not the courage to put on my harness. But to leave you at the outer door after having sent for you would have made you think I am capricious, which is a thing I never was."

"Neither a coquette nor capricious. Nobody can say that you abuse your rights."

"But I have the reputation of abusing nothing," said she, with a change of attitude that showed her sculpturesque lines.

"Oh, yes; one thing only, the power of your beauty."

Maurice said no more, but his fixed gaze showed that the spectator was not unworthy of the sight. As for Madame Gravino, the fatigue of which she had complained had not, we must believe, taken away from the magnetism of her gaze. Her black eyes and Maurice's brown ones, equally accustomed to fly direct to their quarry, crossed like shining sword-blades. Without desiring it, perhaps, the two adversaries were engaged in a conflict where it was difficult to retreat.

The brusque offensive often succeeds in similar cases; but whether Maurice had forgotten the whole out of gallantry upon the prairie, or belonged to that refined school that will not win by a surprise, he remained motionless and silent, showing only by a slight trembling of the lips the effect of the ordeal. Mathilde was the first to make her voice heard.

"I must finish by acknowledging a fault," said she. "I like flattery, from certain mouths. Your practical praise has the merit of the unexpected, for hardly did you once look into my eyes last night. Simone de Montdauphin absorbed you. Fancy me reserving you a place at my own table, and you refusing it! What have you to say for yourself, monsieur?"

"Madame," answered the clever Cléguérac, "I distinguish vaguely that you are speaking to me, but I do not understand what you say."

"Ah, you are deaf?" asked she, without appearing offended at the jest.

"No, but I am listening to you with my eyes, and you tell them things I had not heard for four years. Have pity on me! I am not one of your Parisians. At this instant I feel my head as weak as that of the poor Indian whom a drink of whiskey deprives of his senses, when he will kill, not knowing what he does."

While Maurice was speaking, the countess had drawn in her arms, and was now looking at him with her chin on her crossed hands. Near enough to the young man now for him to distinguish the character of an intaglio she wore, Mathilde replied:

"Shall I tell you that you should always mistrust a woman's curiosity—mine in particular? In this you make me envy the Sioux woman with a flask of rum in her pocket."

Heaven preserve us from believing that the beautiful Mathilde would have continued the metaphor. Without doubt she was not devoid of conscience, for she interrupted herself with one of those Faust-like smiles of which she seemed to have the specialty, and, becoming suddenly almost serious, went on:

"Why not tell you the whole truth! It was not to-day that the idea first came to me of such an escapade. If you only knew how many times I dreamed of setting off, all alone, traversing the ocean, the Canadian forests, the great plains (I have studied them upon the maps), and surprising you in your little wooden house, in your cell where you sleep on a huge bearskin, in the middle

of trophies of lances, tomahawks and bowie-knives. You see, I know 'The Hermitage!' "

Such flattery was superlative to a man of Cléguérac's peculiarities. During a moment he forgot all he held beneath his eyes, and answered, smiling:

"My excellent friend Lavandien visited 'The Hermitage.' You have doubtless read some of his letters, or, perhaps, you are gifted with second sight?"

"No matter!" continued Mathilde. "I know all: your fields where the plough can cut straight furrows by the hour together, your horses it is necessary to tame like fabled monsters, your endless gallops on the prairie, your manufactory, all—even to the blonde Gretchen who adores you, and watches you intently on your way each time you pass."

Not every day did the seductive countess put forth such eloquence. But she knew she was being listened to, and in the mystery of her designs she had resolved to tempt Cléguérac by every philtre—even that of manly pride. All the same, without the least doubt, by a name pronounced at hazard, she had shattered and undone her handiwork.

The fortunate mortal, covered with so many favors, now stood silent, occupied in following out, far, far away, an image visible alone to him. Distinctly he perceived the "Gray House." Irene's pure and tender eyes were turned upon him, conjuring him not to forget, near a rival with so many high advantages, the poor little absent sister cherishing her almost hopeless love.

The confused impression that he had been upon the point of an ungrateful action dominated other tumultuous sensations. Besides, Maurice was one of those to whom affection, far too easily won, seems almost worthless. Already he was able to analyze the situation, sign that he was already victor in the fray. Mathilde had either counted too greatly on her beauty, or on Cléguérac's youth.

Pretending to misunderstand the countess on the nature of the journey she seemed to wish to undertake, the prairie colonist closed his eyes to metaphor, only acknowledging the meaning of the very words. With lowered head he went into the traits and manners of the people, gave descriptions of the country, of its industrial productions, and its chief statistics. Useless to add that he did not pronounce Irene's name, and that he took his leave as soon as such a thing was possible. When he was gone Mathilde no longer knew what to think, so well had he played the part of the simple-minded country farmer—at least, toward the end. During five minutes she asked herself on what manner of man the door had just closed; timid, impressionable beyond measure, very methodic in the art of conversation. All the same, as she was by no means shallow, the very simple idea came to her that his affections might be occupied elsewhere.

"It remains to be seen," said the countess. "No time, however, has been lost." With that she rang for her maid, and, in a sufficiently ill-humor, dressed herself to dine in town.

At the very hour she was leaving the table on the arm of a young officer who seemed to be making him forget his troubles, Cléguérac kept the third and last appointment of the day.

The Marquise de Montdauphin received the newcomer with the satisfaction of a card-player who finds she has an execrable hand, and fancies her partner holds the critical ace. She was not wanting in intelligence, but she made the great mistake of thinking she had far more sense than she possessed; or, perhaps, she did not duly estimate the wisdom of the rest of the world. In a word, she considered everything too easy.

Heaven knows how it could ever be easy, for a widow in straitened circumstances, condemned only to receive in strictest intimacy, to marry properly a woman like Simone. The marquise, having allowed Alain's attentions during two whole seasons, thought herself certain of a son-in-law, and had let people who deemed she was too gracious to the viscount go on talking. She had made arrangements for frequent conversations with him; she judged him sent into the world for the very purpose she desired him for—a fine young fellow, rich, and very capable of love. Unhappily, she had never had the opportunity of talking with the father as with the son. A quarter of an hour's conversation with Count Lavandien—or, still better, with the countess—would have enlightened her. But when the enlightenment began to come, it was too late. Simone certainly was by no means com-

promised, nevertheless, objection-seekers might now name two instead of one: her want of dowry and—Alain.

From the first phrase, Cléguérac was treated as a confidant, which was equivalent to his hearing hard truths about his friend.

"Fancy, he never even gave you a message for my daughter!" cried Madame de Montdauphin indignantly.

Little desirous of taking part in the debate, Maurice answered that his cousin could not be blamed for showing every caution in an affair of this nature.

"He did not even charge me with a visit to his father," added he.

Then the Count Lavandien received the scolding he deserved. His least crime was treating his son with abominable cruelty—an accusation it would have been easy to controvert by an exact picture of the miseries the exile was enduring in New York. One may imagine that Maurice did not say much. He began to find the visit exceedingly tedious. Mademoiselle de Montdauphin, who at once saw this, made an effort to come out of the reverie in which she had been plunged for some minutes. She began to converse with Maurice; they came back to the subject of last evening's meeting—the supper and Marie de Berdons. "I am working myself into a great rage with her," said Cléguérac. "To think of her leaving me all the evening without presenting me to a friend like you."

"It was I who forbade her," said Simone, loyally.

"And may we know the reason why?"

The blood mounted into the young girl's cheeks, whose transparent skin now paled and blushed by turns.

"I do not know, myself," said she. "It amused me to hear you, to see you, without being known. I thought that, on a certain subject, ignorant of my name, you would have been more frank. Afterward you showed the justice of my calculation."

In her fauteuil, near a clear fire, dozed Madame de Montdauphin, seeking, by a spasmodic movement now and then, to show that she also was taking part in the conversation. Regularly, on the morrow of a party, she fell off to sleep after dinner.

"Do you not find it too hot?" asked Simone.

As soon as they were seated at the other end of the room, close to a table discreetly illuminated by an immense rose-colored lace shade, the girl answered:

"You will excuse my mother, will you not? What does she not try and undertake on my behalf? And if we ever were to profit anything——"

Suddenly, Maurice continuing silent, she said to him, turning over an album with distracted fingers:

"Do you not think it would be a worthy action on the part of a man like yourself to prevent my mother and me from being held up to public ridicule? Why do you hide the truth from me? What *are* his wishes? His thoughts? What am I to expect at his hands?"

"His wishes? His thoughts?" replied Cléguérac. "How am I to answer you? Do you not know that, on certain subjects, it would be impossible to say what I could wish to say—to say even what I think myself?"

"Ah," cried she, looking at him in surprise. "What a difference there is between you two! But it is impossible, after passing weeks with him, that you should not know whether or not he loves me. All lies in that."

"No, mademoiselle. All does not lie in that," answered Maurice, sighing. "But to come back to your question, I am certain Alain loves you—in his own way. One must believe that his way so far has sufficed you."

"Put yourself in my place. For four years I went passionately into society. My mother can keep it up no longer. Many young men noticed me, many proposed to me. None of them, you can guess why, persevered in their enthusiasm. On the contrary, Alain for two years paid attention only to me. Never did he lose an opportunity of meeting me. We spoke together just as freely as we pleased. I studied him as though he were a book. Every objection that could possibly be raised, I raised. I spoke to him about his father. He answered me, 'Look at England! Yonder's a nation of real married people, because they marry for affection.'"

"Alain has said the same thing to me, and what I was able to see last night of French society showed me that the liberty of over-the-channel, be-

tween young men and girls, is in a fair way of acclimatization. Alas! mademoiselle, I fear you are running up a long misreckoning. The young Englishwomen are neither more charming nor more worthy of being loved, not in reality, more reasonable than yourselves. But their great power lies in knowing how to deal with young Englishmen. If our brave Lavandien were subject to the queen's will, you would long ago have been separated by the Cape, for Australia or the Indies, with Father Lavandien's blessing, supplemented by bank-notes. But in France, in cases like yours, the father does not wish to give even a blessing; and the son, on his part, aspires to something more than a dozen hundred-franc certificates. All the difficulty lies in that."

"Be it so," answered Simone, regarding Maurice as though he had been a specimen of an unknown type. "But now, tell me, what am I to do?"

"In order to answer well and wisely, I know, as yet, too little of you. Do you thoroughly understand yourself? Lavandien told me that you had a plan of going out to join him on the prairie. Have you the least idea of what you would have undertaken? Are you sure that there is in Paris a young lady of your education, tastes, and habits, sufficiently loving, sufficiently beloved, to have a chance of not dying of *ennui* out there of solitude and of regret? See, you have appealed to my candor. Well, I am afraid one thing only would be wanting at your marriage of love."

"And that?" cried Simone, flashing her magnificent eyes full on Cléguérac.

"Would be *love*."

"On whose behalf do you speak? His or mine?"

"Let us say, on yours. But it is not your fault. To-day everything seems to conduce to the supression of love; education, our manners, the lives we lead. On love the drama pours its choicest irony. The theatre tells us how Molière ridiculed the doctors. Girls would ask nothing better than to love. Are they capable of love? Have you ever seen a real Chinese woman—one of those whose feet have been compressed from infancy? Ask them if they are capable of walking. Poor creatures! Not only has walking been rendered impossible, but they have been persuaded into the belief that it is a vulgar and uncomfortable exercise."

Simone, with a singular smile, closed her eyes.

"Good," sighed she. "I understand. I am a Chinawoman. And, naturally, such a state of being is incurable."

"Oh, mademoiselle! do not wish the poor Chinawoman some fine day to wake up with an inclination for a walk. Unhappy creature—what a martyr she would be!"

"Well, then, people must not love?"

Cléguérac remained some moments without replying. His elbow on the table, head on hand, he had that far-away look so frequent now with him, soft, slightly veiled, which seemed a powerful charm in contrast with his overflowing energy. All

of a sudden his features grew animated and even beautiful with a blaze of inspiration, as he answered firmly, somewhat sadly too:

"No, one must *not* love, if we imagine happiness to lie in the sybarites' repose, to whom all trouble and all effort are unsupportable evils. We must not love if spring with the rose will not also bring the thorn. But, on the contrary, we may and should love, plunging boldly into the infinity and the eternity of love, if one is of the race of the strong, intrepid enough to achieve life's supreme joy by the inevitable payment of suffering supreme. Love embalms, perfumes, and colors life; but it makes the heart bleed inwardly. For all this, love is the spring, the happiness, the wealth of life. The heart that truly loves cherishes its wound, is proud of its pain, and blooms again beneath a very spray of tears. Love is a more sublime Prometheus that has but one fear—of seeing the cruel but beloved vulture vanish!"

Simone listened without a movement, her head slightly thrust out in Cléguérac's direction. Her lips opened wider and wider, her breath grew hurried as she spoke; in her brilliant eyes shone the confused glow of dawn. As soon as Maurice had finished, she waited a few seconds. Then, rising with a tired effort, she spoke:

"Do not let us be cruel to my mother, who is falling for fatigue. It is time I sent you away. But it would be only kind of you to come and see me sometimes."

XVI.

"I DID not see you yesterday," said the general to Maurice, as the young man entered his library, on the next day but one to the ball. "What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Three visits account for my time: To Versepuis, my partner in business. The second, to the Countess de Gravino. The last, to the ladies Montdauphin."

"Fortune, love, and friendship. A well-filled day. But, my hero, I have some little trouble in allowing you the company of the young man whose hand you take before the world."

"Why so? He is an honest fellow, and sugar forms a bond of business between us. I draw mine from the earth. Versepuis has grown rich selling his at six francs a pound, after buying it at ten sous. Do you not think I would do likewise on the prairie if I was always sure of clients?"

"You know that he has placed his name upon the list of suitors for Simone de Montdauphin since Lavandien packed his son off to America? What a comical history! All who play a part in yonder little comedy are either silly, blind, or odious people. I hope you are not going to take a dip into it, in spite of the frowns the poor marquise doubtless showed you."

"She did nothing of the kind, I assure you. She was far too sleepy for that."

"What do you think of her daughter?"

"She is very handsome, and deserves a better husband than Versepuis, I am very certain."

"You might add, a better than Alain de Lavandien."

"Their romance, then, is no secret?"

"It is the secret of about five hundred of the girl's friends and as many comrades of the young man, not to speak of a few hundred of the father's cronies."

"Poor child! I pity her very much; the more so as she treats me as a true friend."

"I felicitate you, for the rôle is a delicate one. But, beware of love!"

"Alas! general, I would give the world to be in love."

"In Paris? How about the countess? Did she also treat you as a friend, our beautiful Mathilde?"

Cléguérac glanced rapidly at his visit to the Hôtel Gravino. The general, who knew his Cléguérac too well, was not deceived.

"A famous doctor for the malady you fear. A headlong woman—incandescent. I have heard her compared to those freezing-machines, belching flame and smoke from which, at the given moment, falls a lovely lump of ice."

Maurice accusing him of exaggeration, M. de Berdons answered:

"This is what comes of passing half the night listening to tattle."

The young man carried away from this conversation a still more lively desire to make himself useful to Simone, and at the same time the fear that the force of circumstances would reduce him to the rank of a simple well-wisher. When they met in society they spoke together long and earnestly with no pretext of dancing. But dancing reunions were not common yet, the season having scarcely begun.

Often Cléguérac would come and sit with the mother and daughter after dinner. The marquise was not always asleep. Whether she slept or not the conversation of the young people was exactly the same—serious, gravely friendly, rather sad. Rarely did the name of Alain leave their lips. Besides, either the young man no longer corresponded, or the Countess Gravino never mentioned his letters. She never called on the Montdauphins. As for Maurice, he had gone to pay his visit on the regulation-day. Things remained in that position.

It would show scanty knowledge of the beautiful Mathilde to say that she was dying of a broken heart. An odd remainder of girlish sentimentalism, retaining bloom and life near the highway by reason of growing in a dell, had been sunned into new life by Alain's romantico-heroic letters. She had painted to herself a fiery, irresistible Cléguérac, and made up her mind to draw him to her feet with all the ardor of her sex. But a hero in a black coat is only half a hero. This prairie scout, without his great

wheel of straw hat and fringed buckskin pantaloons, was but a carpet-knight after all.

But why had he disdained the heart of one who turned all heads at sight, if not for long? A flirt who prides herself upon the many victories of her beauty will not let such a slight pass by without an effort to ascertain the cause.

One day some charitable person said in her hearing:

"It seems Simone has not already history enough. This young man from Canada never leaves her side."

The insinuation was all the more grave, as Simone and her mother never breathed a word about the new-found friend. The countess took the hint, observed the eyes of the accused when she was able to get them together, and came to the conclusion that there was "something in it." Then, a little in spite, a little by reason of the love of noise and disturbance that causes children to throw stones as big as they can lift into the sea, this imprudent personage wrote to Lavandien. Her letter may be thus epitomized:

"People are absolutely infatuated with your cousin. But what an idea to have painted him in all your letters as a hero for courage and poetry! However that may be, if you still cling to Simone, take your precautions. If, on the contrary, you are tired of struggling against wind and tide, all goes well."

Tired of struggling? In point of fact, he was

Simone's betrothed. But the real struggle was not the one he maintained against absence, exile, and his father's implacable will. Temptation had swept him up, body and soul, and had taken a name; for he did not doubt that a word would throw Gladys and her magnificent fortune into his arms. The American was even growing surprised that word was so long delayed. On his part, Pauvell, who busied himself very little with his daughter's affairs, commenced to be uneasy about his own. Without acerbity, but with limpid frankness, he had informed the young man that it was the custom of the house to secure an annual settlement of account. A detailed copy of the said account was given him. This time the unhappy Alain might expect an order to depart to Nova Zembla!

But let us leave him the vain honor of his jealousy and ill-temper. Let us suppose, as he pretended, that indignation against a friend's duplicity, a sweetheart's treason, dictated the letter he wrote Simone—this time direct. Perhaps Mademoiselle de Montdauphin possesses that letter still. She ought to have kept it in order to reread it at those moments of life that demand unusual courage. But no: it is better for those who peruse these pages, and who may chance to meet certain experiences too quickly, not to have the opportunity of perusing Alain's prose.

It was hardly that he forgot, in writing, courtesy, good manners, or respect. The worst reproach we are able to fix on the letter was that while irre-

proachable in seeming tone and form, it bore within it all the calculating implacability of a declaration of war. He declared he had learned "on all sides" of the singular intimacy and significant assiduity which "all Paris" was remarking. His being at so great a distance, and other circumstances and delays, prevented him from asking for a personal explanation. But he drew the natural conclusions. He judged himself forgotten, perhaps replaced. Silently, without recrimination, as became a gentleman, in future he would hold himself aloof.

Never did Simone de Montdauphin show this letter to any but one single human being. She never answered it. It was only after several weeks that she began to speak about it; where and when, we shall shortly see.

As for the young viscount, he allowed twice the necessary time for a reply to pass away; then, one fine evening, as he was taking Gladys home from a ball, where they had talked together all the evening, their engagement was arranged.

The same post that carried the letter to Simone as a New Year's gift brought a letter from Irene to Maurice—the first.

"Alone with my father, in our poor 'Gray House,' which, thanks to the snow, is now a white house, and with a memory full of you, I have just heard the first hour of the New Year sound. That yesterday which puts us all face to face with the future, my beloved father, with his eyes full of tears, employed entirely in talking to me about the future and of

you. I know everything now, and why you went away. If I were to tell you that I understood certain things, it would not be the truth. What crime I committed in coming into the world on the right bank of a certain stream, whereas I ought to have been born upon the other, is a thing that is not very clear to me. It does not matter. If it be not a crime, it is none the less a misfortune. I am rewarded by this certainty.

"Naturally, the same reasons that were the cause of your departure would cause your return to become a trial. Friend, come back without fear. What frightens you—what is frightening my father? That I was beginning to love you too well—and that I was—a very tiresome person?

"Well, I repeat, you may return without scruple and without apprehension. The two perils I spoke about are no longer to be feared. To commence with the second, I will never annoy you. This word tells all, and you will understand it. Never annoy you—never, on the word of Irene von Oberkorn. You shall see. Never unhappy any more; less so, in any case, than I am at this hour, so far away from you.

"As to the other danger, it ought not to stop you, any more than the one just mentioned. No. You need not fear that my heart will be tendered where it cannot be accepted; and I will tell you the reason for the first and last time in my life—the mischief is done.

Au revoir, quite soon.

"Your best friend,

"IRENE VON OBERKORN."

"P. S.—My father does not know that I am writing you this letter. It seems to me this is not wrong, and, more than that, is better."

Maurice answered this "little letter" by these simple words:

"Yes—you are, and always will be, my best friend. I did not know before coming away. I know it better now that I have revisited Paris, I wish to know nothing else. In a few weeks I will be with you."

The next day the general said to Cléguérac, handing him back Irene's just-read letter:

"She calls this canticle of a young martyr a 'little letter.' It is simply sublime. Singular creatures, women. When they give us our life it is a natural thing. When they give us a flower it is a favor, for which, to the end of our days, we have to thank them on our knees. But, with all that, my dear friend, I would not wish to be in your place."

XVII.

MEANWHILE Maurice's sojourn in the metropolis was running on without serious incident, and, in truth, his leave, as he called it, was drawing to a close without his having effected any of the things he came to do. Pleasure and her train glanced off him as ink from an oily page. At first frequenting society with a sort of frenzy, he withdrew himself more and more. Not that he was not treated with all favor, but in this very favor he seemed to breathe the set benevolence that people extend to the stranger on his way, the poor traveller, with whom all intimacy of connection would be loss of time.

The only houses he frequented regularly, almost daily, were the Montdauphins' and the general's; not very gay places, the first especially. Every week he beheld this beautiful young girl, whose every disappointment and chagrin was open to him, growing more pensive and more anxious. What could he do to give her back the glory and perfume of life. Nothing. Not even talk to her of forgetfulness and resignation. The only thing he could attempt was to amuse Simone. It was with genuine pleasure that he saw her endeavor to shake off, during their interviews, the care that every day weighed more and more upon her.

Extraordinary thing! There were not on the earth two women more unlike than Irene and Simone. Soon, nevertheless, Maurice was astonished to discover the growth between them of certain indefinite and mysterious sympathies, something like the family resemblance seen between sisters, through their very dissimilarities. At every instant the questions, reflections, silences, even, of Mademoiselle de Montdauphin caused him to return, in thought, with an inward shudder to Irene. Sometimes he would interrupt one of his own sentences, thinking he had already said the same thing. Indeed, he had said it, but it was in the "Gray House" on the prairie, months before. And, contrary to what we might have thought, it was the nearer of these two distant ones that started these reverberating thoughts.

Still, speaking to Simone, Cléguérac, without knowing it, used to talk with those affectionate intonations one hardly ever remarked in his intercourse with others. On her part, Simone listened with a religious confidence, and, when he had promised to come in the evening, all kinds of pleasure parties were inexorably refused. Then, under the pretext that her mother was fatigued, Simone caused the outer door to be closed, which did not prevent the poor marquise tiring herself till midnight. At first she would take part in the conversation, while her daughter and Maurice exchanged the latest items of society. But soon the talk glided softly on a certain subject, always the same.

Cléguérac, without perceiving it, went on until his speech became a monologue. To be only fair, it was a pleasure to hear him say how much we ought to pity, very often, those who have known a mighty love, as we ought to pity, above all, those whose lives are ever rendered incomplete by love's great revelations.

And when, on a certain evening, he avowed that he had never known such love himself, Mademoiselle de Montdauphin closed her eyes to hide their too vivid gleams. That very evening, embracing her daughter as she was going to bed, the marquise was dazzled at the shining beauty of her daughter.

"Dear child," thought she, "doubtless they have communicated to her good news from over yonder."

Another day, when Cléguérac mentioned that his departure for America was fixed for the following month, Simone had a nervous attack almost resembling anger. Feeling herself gazed at with surprise, she cried:

"I am not one of those to whom the future is an agreeable subject."

Some minutes afterward, Maurice, much saddened, took leave of mother and daughter.

Mademoiselle de Montdauphin's eyes were swimming in tears.

"Adieu, my only friend!" she sighed.

These words did not long remain without an explanation. Sigismund, the very next morning, called on Cléguérac, which was an unusual thing on

his part, in spite of the community of interests the reader is so well aware of. At first the conversation beat about the bushes, Versepuis turning on Maurice, from time to time, looks so strange that one would have thought he was going out of his head, then other looks that seemed to say he was going to prove murderous. Successively he essayed three successive chairs, one of them already occupied by his own hat; he burned the carpet with a fusee by means of which he had vainly essayed to light his cigarette; and, finally, with the air of a man who is about to present his jaws to the dentist, he began:

"Monsieur, you are the only man in Paris to whom I would say what I am going to say. I am neither handsome, brilliant, useful, nor celebrated. I keep no horses, and understand less than nothing of sport. Without illusions, I make use of a title because it proves agreeable to me; the man who signed the parchment is still there to tell the tale. In a word, there is nothing about me which might turn a young woman's head. But—there is, of course, a *but*—the revenues of my fortune, exclusively in ready money, mounted up last year to the sum of eighty-six thousand livres."

"Let us say a hundred at once," cried Cléguérac. "My dear sir, you will have to live very economically."

"Much less so than you imagine. It costs money to enter real society. I have lent money to many friends—that is to say, to men who seemed about to

be of use to me. Charitable donations take up a goodly sum. And New Year's day presents almost swept away my cash. Besides, there is the theatre."

"The deuce! If you run after actresses."

"Why, there are plenty of spectators. When, by chance, some lady speaks at large before me of a piece she has *not* seen, and that is a thing that occurs with remarkable frequency, I see that she receives the next day, cost what it may, the best box to be bought. A box, my dear fellow, a Parisian will do anything to get a box."

"This experience is not within the means of all the world, my dear baron. But, if you will please to inform me, what is to be the subject of our interview?"

"To show you, if I am lucky enough to be able, that I am worth more than my appearance. Now, I have dreamed a dream—a dream so foolish that I never yet told it to a living soul. Probably you will laugh. Perhaps you will do more than laugh. Perhaps, with a loyal word, you will cause that dream to evaporate. For me, monsieur, there is only one woman in the world who extends to *you* the most marked confidence. I speak of Mademoiselle de Montdauphin."

Cléguérac surveyed Versepuis with an attention he had never hitherto given. Once or twice he tugged at his slender mustache, then answered:

"Dreams of this kind never make me laugh when they are told as you have told me yours.

But it remains to be ascertained, in the first place, if the person you speak of is free."

"She is, at least, in all that concerns a certain viscount. I give you this as a certainty. That young man has completely cut the ground from under him."

"Allow me to say that that is rather a grave affirmation in regard to a man well known to be one of my friends."

"Well, monsieur, we will affirm nothing, since the subject seems to displease you. But let us suppose that Mademoiselle de Montdauphin is free—as regards your friend. In your true and loyal nature, do you know any reasons, any other reasons to advise me to keep my dream within my own poor brain?"

"What do you mean?"

"Heavens! I could never be more than a makeshift for a woman of her birth and beauty; and thus, if you have any personal motives for believing that another suitor occupies the field, it would be only kind to tell me—and I would disappear."

"Monsieur," said Maurice, who understood him at last, "you push your dream rather far. As I have had the honor to tell you, I am Alain de Lavandien's friend. I may add that I have been his confidant. Among eight answers that I might make you, this seems the best."

"Then," said Sigismund, ready to weep with joy, "does it not seem to you that I might be the means of repairing one of the cruellest injustices of fate?

Ah, monsieur, when I see other women more richly dressed than that adorable creature, I feel like tearing the robe from off their shoulders. When she passes in her hackney carriage I clinch my hands, and if I must tell you, it is the hired trap that prevents me buying one of my own. I should die of shame. And to think that a word, one word, would be all-sufficient! May she pronounce it! All that I have I would lay at her feet, to make her beautiful and happy. I would become once more the poor man, fed, clothed—dare I add—loved by her."

Sigismund, as he spoke, grew almost handsome. It was, at least, touching to listen to him, and Cléguérac said to him, with one of those warm handshakes of which he was by no means prodigal:

"And still it would have cost Providence nothing had your name been Alain de Lavandien."

"In good truth, monsieur," answered Sigismund, who was very tenacious of his ideas, "as for that, I had rather my name was Maurice de Cléguérac."

Maurice had still time to see the general before lunch. Without losing a moment he repaired to his house. The door of the well-known library was not open, and M. de Berdons exclaimed:

"Well, you hardly anticipated this. Your friend Lavandien marries the American."

The rumor came from the club, one of the well-informed ones having laid claim the evening before that he knew the Count de Lavandien's intentions.

"But," said Maurice, "at that very hour I was

with the Mesdames de Montdauphin. Neither the daugher nor the mother told me of it, which they would have done. For I imagine that the viscount would have at least informed them."

Mademoiselle de Berdons, called into the council, declared that her friend had been no more explicit with herself.

"For the rest," added she, twisting her handkerchief, "during several weeks she has greatly changed. We see each other less."

"Put on your hat, find an escort, and go and see her," decided the old warrior.

Maurice objected that the move was an imprudent one, for whether the news was true or false she was equally unaware of it.

"Ah, then, you would leave two poor women, whose friend you are, to face the storm by themselves. Go yourself and interview the count, since this story seems to emanate from him."

"We are not on friendly terms on account of his son's stay at 'The Hermitage.' He did not return my formal visit."

"If Master Alain has capitulated, you need be no longer enemies. And, what the dickens, man, he cannot eat you!"

At about 2 o'clock Cléguérac rang the count's bell. Monsieur had gone out, but madame sent word that she would see her visitor with pleasure.

"Hum," growled Maurice, "it is a pleasure that will not include much good-will. Poor Simone's affairs are going very ill. But fortune favors me

in getting me an interview with the lady instead of her clown of a husband."

With a more extensive acquaintance with both, it is probable he would have classed the couple very differently.

The Lavandiens were proud of a well-kept home, —a different thing from that rarer kind of home, a happy one. For the latter, in reality, innumerable conditions are necessary, whereas you may have a stylish home that is wanting in almost all else save style.

The countess was pious, cold, and dictatorial. The count was lazy, egotistic, always tired. Their mutual love of money was a passion eminently favorable to keeping up a fashionable home, for it is incompatible with most other sentiments. Not that they were misers or even unusually stingy. They received little, but in the best of style, and passed for being rather charitable. As for themselves, their lives were so arranged—physically as well as morally—in such a fashion as to defy the heat of the sun in August, and the stray current of cold air in December. Do you think these pleasures may be tasted, these virtues practised, on an empty pocketbook?

Maurice, like most pepole, was unaware of the important rôle Madame de Lavandien played in her home, for that intelligent lady never, for five-and-twenty years, had her husband's name out of her mouth. All rigorous, harsh, or doubtful proceedings, everything classed under the heading of

"acts of proper firmness," thus passed to the credit of the poor count, who was generally reputed as a man almost without a heart. From the time when she had let the blow fall on her son, the countess never missed adding, the operation over:

"Now go, and tell your father you will not do so and so!"

Twenty years afterward, so powerful is the force of habit of thought, Alain had never set himself to ask if it was indeed "papa" who had opened fire. For even stronger reasons this displacement of marital responsibility was unsuspected by Cléguérac.

The countess came to him with outstretched hands, a slightly uneasy look, but with a subtle smile that said—all that she desired it to say. She only pronounced at first the little words:

"At last!'

Then she made Maurice sit down beside her, and, as though in explanation of the "at last," with a possible double interpretation, she added:

"It was so annoying, this semblance of a quarrel between us. But my husband is a bar of steel. Poor Alain knows something about that. And to think I was not even able to receive news of him through your mouth. How did you leave him?"

"I left him in New York," said Cléguérac, "in the best of bodily and mental condition."

The constraint he was putting on himself to speak indirectly rendered Maurice very nervous. He was hardly master of himself when Madame de

Lavandien put the following questions, in the most natural way:

"And what do you think of Miss Pauvell? You have seen her?"

"I have seen her," answered he, with a look which forced the countess to lower her eyes. "She is pretty, intelligent, and no more of a flirt than the average Fifth Avenue heiress, not more distinguished than the granddaughter of a petty Brooklyn ship-owner might be expected to be. You can hardly set it down as a crime in an American to love luxury, independence, dress, and violent exercise. They have told you, I surmise, she is a Protestant?"

"The children shall be Catholics," declared the countess, who had recovered her presence of mind.

"Oh, as to that," said Cléguérac, growing more excited, "I do not feel any anxiety. The Pauvells would consent to see their grandchildren Israelites, Mussulmans, or Buddhists, according to circumstances. But now, madame, allow me to ask if we are to believe the rumor that is in circulation?"

The countess' eyes assumed the offensive while she answered:

"Nothing is yet official. I suppose, my dear cousin, you will not be upon our adversaries' side, if we make up our minds?"

"I shall be on the side of justice and of honor. Your son pledged his word to Mademoiselle de Montdauphin. She is worthy of him, and their engagement being more or less known that young lady, after a rupture, would be compromised. She

has neither father nor brother to stand by her side and sustain her. Her only fault is that she is poor. If to pity her suffices to constitute me one of your enemies, I fear that you will find a host of them. Pardon my frankness, but the disposition to take a woman's part is, thank Heaven, still a Frenchman's pride."

With the calmness of a player who has but to show her cards in order to win, the countess answered:

"You threaten me with the opinion of the world. Well, cousin, you need not mistake in this world, foolish as it is, Calypso's grot for Ariadne's rock. If you wish to give the young girl the rôle of the lovely weeper, you need not so perfectly console her. O Heaven! people doubt all good, all honor!" Maurice remained immovable a second, suddenly calm, considering this last manœuvre with a sort of admiration mingled with disgust, since he understood its cleverness. Accustomed to struggling without trickery, in the stern warfare with wild nature, he felt himself powerless against this combination of the perfidies of civilization. But above all he experienced, with dread discouragement, the fear of having contributed, without knowing it, to the defeat of the very cause he would have sustained. At first he tried to oppose such mockery.

"This is the first time I have heard that I am said to be playing the part of consoler, for which I feel myself ill-constituted. Allow me to smile at the idea."

"I do allow you, monsieur, all the more so that you will be the only one to see anything laughable in it—in a little while."

"Madame," said Cléguérac, rising, "till now I never thought a human being, man or woman, would ever stand in need of consolation for having counted on the word of the Viscount de Lavandien. You seem to wish me to understand that I am mistaken? It is not for myself I regret my error. Mademoiselle de Montdauphin knows, as all the world knows, that I shall be on the Atlantic in a fortnight. It is, therefore, not *I* who will console her for being abandoned by your son; but I swear to you she would stand in no need of consolation—if she thought on one point as I do."

"Really?" asked the countess, with a yawn of impertinence.

"Yes, madame, really. And I pity you for being obliged to recognize within yourself that I am right."

At these words he took his leave and went home, his conscience not so calm as his looks betokened, saying to himself that after all, for a month or more, he had perhaps visited the Montdauphins rather too often.

"Well," he thought, "I need return once only to take my leave. It is the best way to allow these absurd rumors to subside."

In this he was mistaken. On the Parisian ocean, as on that of the globe itself, it requires more than an hour's wind to raise the waves, and it is precisely when the gale is falling that the sea runs

highest. How many worldly intrigues have lasted months without being suspected! In time, in order to take flight, love preens his lissome wings. It is the very moment when the lovers, passing under other laws, perhaps make a detour in order not to meet upon the highway, that their names are linked in every mouth. "Everywhere you meet them together! They never leave each other!"

While Maurice no longer met Mademoiselle de Montdauphin in the drawing-rooms now closed by the days of Lent, or even called upon her mother, the world was persuaded their lives were passed side by side. From this it resulted that at the first murmur of Alain's marriage with a rich American, public opinion was not nearly so much against the viscount as Cléguérac had anticipated. Mademoiselle de Montdauphin, far from being pitied by the men, had a great number against her, not only because she had, as society opined, thrown the viscount over, but above all that she had deceived him before marriage. Infidelity is villany when it precedes the sacrament.

The young men condemned Simone without animus, but without appeal, with the dashing good sense that pervades their words and deeds nowadays. They said:

"What is it she wants? To go to America with handsome but penniless Cléguérac? Better have made the voyage—since she was not afraid of it—with Lavandien, whose father, so people said, would not have left him over there forever.

Men of the world congratulated the father on his luck, with cunning chuckles, and on his cleverness in seizing it. A little more and they would have begun to boast that Maurice's visit was not a thing of chance, but expressly arranged to relieve the family from its embarrassments.

As for Sigismund, it was a pleasure to hear him talk. Since his explanation with Cléguérac, sure that the field was free in that direction, he had worn the pretty Simone's colors with intrepidity.

"Of a truth," said he, "the public is deceived. Monsieur le Viscount de Lavandien repudiates his engagements; it is his own affair—he wasn't the first to act so. What is a novelty in the case is, that the debtor who has let his bill of exchange go to protest, insists that the creditor should go into the bankruptcy court."

Little more was needed to create, in favor of Simone, a light but steady counter current. If Alain's defenders had counted simply double the generations of their nobility (that is to say, two) the viscount on his part would not have had so compact a party at his back. In spite of all, Count de Lavandien had his ears peppered, the price of his honor. These latter bits of scandal did not fail to reach Versepuis. The young man spoke of blood and massacre. Love, hatred, anger, wrought his ardor to fever heat, making him almost sublime. Maurice, the only one whose tongue was tied amid all this noise, had all the trouble in the world to calm Simone's new champion.

"What! answered Sigismund, "you can remain unmoved in face of all these calumnies, all this injustice, in which it seems that all the world is implicated!"

"There is so little coolness left me," said Clégéurac, "that I wish I was already far away, being only able to do evil with my presence."

Madame de Lavandien, during this time, cleverly got the mockers on her side with a sentence:

"What reassures me is the advent of the saint's days. One must have the confectioners' truce for Easter eggs as well as New Year sweetmeats."

XVIII.

MAURICE beheld the arrival of the first day of the week in which he was to take his departure. It was time to begin his rounds of leave-taking. As was his way, he commenced with bidding good-by to the dead—that is, to the tomb in Père-Lachaise, where slept his father and mother, lost to him in his fifteenth year.

He had not foreseen that Easter Monday would fill the immense cemetery with promenaders, either come in grief or for a walk. This crowd at first greatly vexed him, for his own visit did not seem to him a pilgrimage to an insensible block of stone, carrying engraved names dear in other days. He came to seek an interview with present, living, and clairvoyant spirits. In reality he considered the mysterious realm of death not only with divine serenity of faith, but with the sweet confidence that that world of death of ours, though so invisible, may still be felt. He did not fear that the inevitable transformation of matter had the power of enfeebling either the bond of love or the vigilant protection of devoted friendship. He thought the dead became, even more than formerly, just, good, tender, faithful to reciprocal memories, grateful for the pious care of their well-being from beyond the

grave. He loved to call them up, to pronounce their names aloud in lonely walks; never did he feel himself very far away from them.

The corner of earth where slept his dear ones, where, some day, he would himself slumber if the prairie did not guard his bones, was situated at the base of one of the steepest parts of a burial-hill. This picturesque spot had nothing of the odious regularity of the ordinary necropolis, for the natural irregularities of the ground had defied the surveyors' level. Each of the sleepers was arranged according to his taste, his fortune, in the precise spot of choice. Some contemplated Paris from their proud colonnade of sun-illumined marble; others hid themselves between the rocks beneath the mossy turf. In that spot there was but slender space remaining, even for the narrow couch of a young girl, while a cluster of eglantines served for the shelter of a nightingale, who sings there little thinking to what thoughtless ears.

By narrow and abrupt paths, full of artificial steps, Maurice attained the great sarcophagus of stone, and placed his flowers on it. Then, in a sort of waking dream, praying, meditating, evoking memory, calling reason to his aid, the young traveller, ready to leave France anew, passed an entire hour, hardly troubled in the least by promenaders in this steep and lonely place.

"And so," he thought, "I leave my native country once again! When shall I ever see it more?

Shall I come back alone, as I go? What would those say who sleep *there* if, some day, I were to kneel at the sacred stone with *her?* And if, the hour at hand, I ask for her, my well-beloved, permission to sleep in this spot where the shock of nations comes but as a summer inland murmur of the ocean, would your spirits be offended? Oh, say that it would not be so! Say that it matters little to you what the name of this stranger buried by your side may be, if, at the end of that name, one is able to write that she made your son happy!"

In the course of but a week or two, after four months' separation, he was about to find himself face to face with Irene, without anything between them being changed, unless that she had avowed her love as hopeless, resigned to all, resolved to simply be an *ennui* to the man she loved. On his side he left Paris without having even amused himself in the least, let alone forgotten. Many things that he had seen and heard, that he reproached himself with doing, remained upon his heart like a disgust. And vainly had he asked himself, asked others on the part he ought to have taken. Vainly, for an hour, he questioned the dead——

At that moment he felt a mysterious mental shock. Was it death answering by some inner oracle, that mingled in his mind this sense of mingled peace and sadness? For instead of the fever of approaching strife, he felt a sudden calm. Something said to him:

"Agitate thyself no further: destiny will say the

word. Thy spirit seeks but good and duty. It is enough; Heaven will perform the rest. Depart in peace!"

He applied his lips to the stone, now almost warm with brilliant sunshine, and went away more happy, stronger, still surprised he was not even happier. As he was redescending the zig-zag paths he perceived that the bronze gate of a mortuary chapel stood open. A maid-servant from some good family was scrupulously cleaning it. The sight was but an ordinary one: Maurice passed by. But hardly had he turned the corner of the rock against which the monument reposed than he nearly fell over a young girl, dressed in mourning, seated on a natural bank of moss, and filling with magnificent roses a *jardinière* that stood near her.

It was Simone.

She lifted her eyes at the noise, blushed vividly at first, then smiled, with an outburst of joy that made her beauty resplendent.

"Yes, it is I!" cried she, seeing that Maurice was still too much surprised to speak. "Are you afraid I am a phantom?"

"I expected this so little," he stammered.

"To find in such a place the girl you called, a certain evening, oh, *so* worldly! Well, you see I judge you better. Nothing surprises me less in you than to find your heart is faithful to the dead. By chance, is it possible that in this city of graves we are neighbors?"

"Near enough," said he. "My parents sleep

above there—beneath that waving tree. I came to bid them farewell."

"Ah! really, are you soon going away?"

She said no more, but Maurice read in her eyes a well-deserved reproach.

"I must leave this week," he answered," and every day I wish to come and see you. But you do not know what a deluge of occupations whelms the parting guest, when one is going so far and for so long!"

Occupied with her loveliest roses, Simone hardly seemed to be listening to Clégéurac.

"Since I have known you I try and learn never to complain," she said at last.

Then, having finally bound her roses with luxurious blades of grass springing up around her:

"Would you mind," she asked, "conducting me to *them?*"

Without a word, for the upward path was curved and difficult, they accomplished the little journey. When they had reached the looked-for tomb, Mademoiselle de Montdauphin laid a floral offering side by side with Maurice's, after which she prayed upon her knees, her forehead on the marble. When she rose her eyes were wet.

"You lost them long ago?" she asked, sitting at the plinth of the mausoleum.

"When I was fifteen years of age, with an interval of a few weeks; they died of the same illness, typhoid fever."

"As for me," said Simone, "I said adieu to my

father when I was fourteen. He was the only being who really loved me—as one longs to be loved. Ah! yes, kind Heaven, the only, only one. At no moment of my life have I understood this consoling truth so well as I understand it at this hour in this cemetery."

Cléguérac murmured a few words of encouragement. With a gesture she expressed that the effort would be futile. At the same time she smiled, but painful dimples, showing drawn and tense, betrayed the effort.

"Let us change the subject," said she soon. "This worldly woman, whom you little know, experiences the want of putting far away, once for all, every semblance of qualities she does not possess. Do not imagine that I come here regularly, as I ought to do. When the living make me happy I forget the dead, to come to them again when I am suffering. I have an idea that Père-Lachaise will see me often, now, however. Would you like," added she, after a silence, "that we should make an arrangement?"

"What kind of arrangement?"

"If it would be any possible pleasure to you, once a week I will come and see your dead. Then, in exchange, you will think of me—once a week. Is it too much?"

"Simone," said he, taking the young girl's arm and warmly pressing it, "have you already forgotten our friendly alliance? It is not every week, but every day my thoughts will fly to you. Heaven

forfend that I should advise you to forget the dead. But for a delicate, tender young girl like yourself, the marble of a tomb is but a poor place of repose in hours of lassitude and sadness. Believe me; do not make too frequent visits here."

"Ah!" said she, "if you knew how often I would come, yes, often——" She gently struck the marble with her open hand. "This stone will see me as I am at this moment, save that I shall be *alone*."

Suddenly, without any warning of the crisis, she burst out sobbing, while her companion, greatly moved by a despair he was unable to understand, let the healing tears fall without a syllable.

As soon as Simone was a little calmer he said:

"I conjure you to assure yourself that in me you have the best of friends. I leave you happy in the leaving—yes, very happy—if I could wipe away the poignant image these tears will leave upon my memory. Will you not allow me to console you? Poor child! if you open your eyes consolation for you will be only too easy. Your heart has been deceived; collect it once again within your breast. Have courage. Call to your help your pride. Youth ordains that you should hope, believe, and live."

She dried her eyes, shrugged her shoulders, and, beating the turf with her feet, responded:

"Well, then, you fear that the chagrin of being separated for ever from Alain de Lavandien will shortly bring my casket to this place, covered with roses and white lilies?"

"No. Heaven be praised!" answered Maurice, painfully impressed by such apparently ill-timed irony. "But there is a worse thing for a woman than being deceived in a lover—it is to go back too soon to her error."

Mademoiselle de Montdauphin looked Cléguérac in the eyes with a sort of passionate anger.

"One man has no right to reproach me with being healed too quickly," said she. "Can you blame me for being neither blind nor deaf? Yes, you have convinced me. I was walking on a false road, but I was walking in good faith, courageously, honestly, determined not to fail, even when the end seemed ever to draw back and disappear in darkness. Then you came. You took me by the hand. You forced me to turn my head. You made me admire, desire life's real road—that which mounts, in the glory of the dazzling sun, to the eternal summits. This is your work. And now—is it not so?—the hour sounds for me to drop this guiding hand. You are going! I remain alone, with the fatal knowledge of what you have taught me, and I ought to sit in classic drapery with my chagrin for company, at the end of the path leading nowhere. I must shed my tears correctly, in view of the moved and edified spectators. But, as for me, I will not. I am young, beautiful—I wish to suffer. But I wish that others should suffer, struggle, make sacrifices for me. I want to love and to be truly loved by the one that you have caused me thus to know."

She interrupted herself, breathless, exhausted, transfigured, more magnificently handsome than she had ever been—than she would ever be again, poor child, at any other moment of her life. Cléguérac admired her in silence. He thought aloud:

"How was *he* able to renounce you without a throb of agony, a prayer for pardon, a single word?"

And now Simone was seized with laughter, dolorous to hear.

"Pardon!" cried she. "Why, it is he that ought to forgive me; or, at least, it is thus such things are arranged. He wrote me. Do not slander him."

"Alain wrote you! Why did you conceal the fact from me?"

Mademoiselle de Montdauphin undid her corsage at the top and drew out an oft-refolded envelope, putting it, almost forcibly, in Cléguérac's hands.

"Read it," cried she, with a bitterness that changed her visage. "You are my friend in reality! You ought to know all your friend's secrets."

And Maurice, at first indignant, then wofully moved by the rôle they had assigned him in this miserable comedy, ran through the lines, from one end to the other, that accused Simone of having given the first place in her heart to another man—to wit, Cléguérac.

"The wretch! said he, giving back the letter. "You answered it?"

Slowly, with trembling hands, she replaced the

paper, her eyes drooping on the envelope. She murmured, in a voice as soft as turtles calling from contiguous trees:

"Hardly had I finished the reading of this letter than I bounded to my desk to answer. I put an empty page before me, I dipped my pen in the ink, and thought about what I should write. How long this self-interrogation lasted I cannot say. All that I know is that, red with shame, happy, very happy all the same, I left my table without tracing a line. For what I had read was but the naked truth, and Simone de Montdauphin, with all her faults and all her weaknesses, has never lied."

Long silence reigned. She rested, humbly in the fearful attitude of a penitent who comes to confess the supreme misdoing of her life. When, at last she raised her eyes, it was to see Cléguérac looking at her very, very sadly. At that hour she recognized her destiny. With a brusque movement she stood up.

"I am crazed," said she, with a calmness that caused awe at such a moment. "I should be getting home. My maid will think me lost. Adieu, monsieur, and may happiness ever be yours!"

Maurice, troubled to the depths of his nature, murmured:

"I will go and take leave of madame your mother and yourself."

"Oh, no," said she, with desperate energy. "For pity's sake, don't come. Let us leave each other

with this souvenir. The sofas and lustres of a salon after the turf and trees of God! Every-day phrases of the world after what you have just heard! An *au revoir* said with the tips of the lips after the *adieu* you carry away! No; I deserve better. Do not come, and sometimes think of Père-Lachaise."

Already she was going. Her name, spoken by Cléguérac, caused her to turn, obedient as a child.

"Simone, by your father's spirit, I conjure you to take courage. Of we two, you are the happier. If you only knew—— For you the future stretches, wide and pleasant, full of hope. You will be loved. Why should you *not* be loved?"

"You wish to infer," said she, "that I may anticipate the joy of not dying an old maid? Oh, I know it! There is Sigismund, Baron Versepuis. I have made a conquest of him. These roses you admired came from him. You do not suppose I could make the dead so costly an offering out of my own pocket?"

She smiled while pronouncing these words—a phantom smile her worst enemy could not have seen without profound pity. Suddenly her superb visage took on a semblance of sinister disdain.

"As a matter of fact," said she, "you know this. He has been to you to gain your sympathy. What do you think of this rich, disinterested, virtuous man who consents to sacrifice his existence to me."

"I think a great deal of good of him," answered Cléguérac. "I have confidence in him, and I esteem him. Only, for pity's sake——"

Simone had grasped Maurice by the arm. She clenched her fingers upon him like a cruel charming claw, then said, regarding her interlocutor for the last time in the eyes:

"You esteem him? Well, you may also pity him; for it is very probable that I shall marry him."

Simone walked rapidly away from Maurice past the tombs, throwing back as the echo of this threat a choked note or two of laughter, probably an irrepressible sob.

XIX.

EMOTIONS and incidents generally march in pairs. On returning home, Maurice found a letter from Irene. Although she had shown no sign since New Year's day, she excused herself in this fresh letter.

"I vow to you that, putting out my lamp a little while ago, I had no thought of writing to you. I mean by that no more thought than usual. But a voice came that wakened me at night, commanding me to write to you. The order was sweet—yes, very sweet to your little friend; and yet how I shuddered at the voice! Is it a presentiment? Are you ill? Has anything annoying happened to you? It seems to me, no. And I *feel* that you are neither ill nor threatened. On the contrary, I *know* that you will soon come back.

"But what am I to write? This is a thing the voice did not tell me. News? Alas! prairie news —— The snow has disappeared, your fields are putting on their green uniform to welcome you. Not a single horse has run away all the winter. All this is already known to you. Yes, it was something else the voice ordered me to write. But what? Alas! what good does it do to close the ears, to pretend ignorance? The voice has revealed to me that I should write to you exactly what I promised never to write to you. Oh! wicked voice, but so all-powerful I cannot choose

but listen. I must obey. I must write down on this paper that I love you with my whole, whole heart; I bless you, and I pray God you may have a prosperous voyage, and that you will come back to me soon—soon, will you not? And now, I am going to sleep again. The voice tells all is well. Do not you say that all is not well. What harm can your little friend do, who loves only the kind Lord, her father, and yourself?

"IRENE."

Cléguérac, without leaving the table where he had perused the letter, seized a pen and covered several pages, which he tore up instead of sending.

"It is better not." These words came from the workings of his mind. If some day he was destined to *forget*, at least he wished, out of filial respect, to remember he trod his native land. With a great sigh of anguish he quickly traced a few lines that simply announced the date of departure as the ensuing Saturday. By the same mail he sent orders to "The Hermitage" to prepare for his arrival. Then, having dined alone, and very sadly, he went to spend his last night at the general's.

M. de Berdons, seeing Maurice enter, was struck with the fatigue and discouragement that seemed suddenly to have made him an older man. At the same time he attributed these symptoms, very noticeable in a man usually so marked by overflowing energy, to a cause which certainly was not the right one.

"What a comical fellow you are!" cried the sep-

tuagenarian hero. "Why this appearance of a raw recruit after his first battle? One would say you were afraid to go away. What the deuce! You are not yet at the elevation where the future shows no difficulties and no uncertainties. Singular man! When you came to bid me adieu, four years ago, the platform was not so high, yet you carried your head higher."

"The reason was this," he replied: "the future seemed to me a plain ill-lighted, but, at the same time, illimitable. To-day I feel like a corralled colt without the smallest loophole of escape. I feel myself a victim of the inevitable. Yes, I am afraid to return over yonder, precisely because I am too glad to get away. Nevertheless I cannot remain. Besides, Heaven only knows whether I would wish to do so were it possible. I have seen, in the course of four months, too many things that have distressed me—nay, saddened me to the soul. To sum all up in one sentence, instead of amusing myself I have been bored and wearied more than ever before in my life."

"Does that surprise you? Paris, my dear Maurice, is only a grand spectacular drawing-room, where each, according to his humor, sees played out the comedies and tragedies, the coarser farces too of real life. When I go to the theatre the deuce take me if the most laughable piece makes me laugh on the evenings when I feel my bullet. Of course, the bullet is always making itself felt at the most inopportune moments. You have re-

marked something like it in your own case, have you not?"

"Hum," groaned Cléguérac, "mine I *always* feel. And even, if I must confess it, more and more as time proceeds."

"And you return to the spot where the first gun was fired. Poor boy! Go with a blessing, for, whatever comes and goes, you have a brave and loyal spirit. It is hard to think our parting hand-grip will be the last. I am old, and doubtless you will not return for a long, long time, if you marry over yonder."

"I swear to you, I leave you with your words engraven on my heart. It might be better not? What will happen? God must decide. What *is* certain is that the danger is greater here than near her. Coming here, I thought to follow the path of duty; but Paris, instead of healing, made me worse. I compared notes, and when I felt myself lost, stifled in this throng of frivolous beings, bereft of energies, deprived of faith and courage, I hungered for sincerity, generous self-abnegation, true tenderness. And now at length, who knows? Perhaps we shall find sufficient pleasure in pure friendship to cause us to forget the rest. And I will work harder than ever. The years will pass away. I am not so far from the epoch where one is protected against himself by that best of guardian angels, a head of gray hair."

"You are greatly unhinged, my poor Cléguérac!" said the general, embracing his young friend

Thereupon Mademoiselle de Berdons, sent for by her father, came to receive Maurice's farewell. The talk ran on his voyage and the route.

"You will pass through New York?" said the old man. "This is what puzzles me, I say. How will you come to an understandng with your cousin? If you see him, what will you say to him? And if you do *not* see him, what will people say?"

These observations struck Cléguérac by their sense and justice. Without much delay he could sail on Tuesday, taking ship for Quebec direct from Liverpool. Accustomed to instant decisions, he stopped and thought out this little change in his projects.

Marie de Berdons, previously informed of his intentions, asked:

"But suppose they only expect you by the Havre liner? The mail has already left."

"I will telegraph from Quebec to Montreal, and so on," cried Cléguérac.

Shortly after that he left, more moved than he wished to appear, for in all France he had no better friends than the De Berdons. Left alone with his daughter, the general said:

"As for you, Marie, you will do me a favor by never falling in love with anybody. Do you hear—anybody? Love *always* burns one's fingers."

"Be easy in your mind, papa," answered she. "It was not for nothing that I am Simone's intimate companion. Let her miseries prove my experience, and when it *does* happen to me to fall in love——"

"Hens will grow molar teeth!" finished the old man, amused at Marie's gesture of disdain.

"No," said she, lifting her head. "But I will love *well.*"

"So much for my words," said the general, shrugging his shoulders. "Go to bed, you little rogue."

XX.

TOWARD the close of the ensuing week Maurice was getting off the *Oregon*, which had ascended the St. Lawrence on its way to Montreal. From the docks to the station was but a bound. It seemed there was a departing train of the Canadian-Pacific in the station; he was fortunate enough to find a vacant sleeping-berth.

The second day of his journey over the track he arrived at Port Arthur, and thought it was time to warn his factotum at "The Hermitage" that they might count on his arrival by the train carrying the French mail, which, at that hour, was hardly starting from New York. He telegraphed his arrival at the station of Beausejours on the morning of the next day but one. Without doubt the times were out of joint, for when the train stopped at the sign-post of Beausejours, which the previous year had witnessed the misfortunes of another traveller, the prairie once more offered no visible object to the eye—neither trace of equipage nor of pedestrian. A just return of fortune here below!

Cléguérac, left abandoned with his two valises, could not help smiling at the thought that Alain was revenged. But, for himself, the innate difficulties of the situation were by no means so great.

He set off on foot, breathing the powerful breath of the Great North West with refreshed lungs, happy to stretch his legs after the half week passed in the rolling prison of the sleeping-car.

Soon, over the scarce-outlined crest of the hill, he made out the more pronounced line of Moose Brook, and the little gables, so many times beheld in dreams, of the "Gray House." He drew near—nothing had changed. In spite of the freshness of the morning, a certain window with white curtains was wide open, but no human being was visible.

"The imprudent girl," said the young man. "It is yet very chilly this morning."

The too early hour prevented him from knocking at Irene's door. The voyageur passed by with slower footsteps, listening for the least noise within the house. What a cry of surprise and joy she would utter should she see him! What regrets that "sister Anne" was not at her post of duty! He was nevertheless consoled anew by a sight that met him in the belvidere. At the very feet of the wooden bench were to be seen a thick bank of recently-planted flowers, and this floral tribute touched Cléguérac's heart with a very sweet emotion, for he knew that they were planted in honor of his return.

To know himself awaited, longed-for! To know that somebody is interrogating Heaven on your behalf, smiling at calm weather, groaning when the slightest wind arises—counting every hour! O you whose appearance some living creature prays for,

in order at last to breath at ease and sleep without an anxious dream, take to heart the incomparable value of the pure boon of love—that purest, sweetest of all earthly joys. Esteem it at its proper value. Ah! if you had heard what Maurice de Cléguérac said when he found out, two hours later, beneath the little wooden porch upon the well-known seat——

And now he hastened his steps anew, desirous of finding himself at home, and sending for his slender baggage. Already he perceived, far away in the valley, on the borders of the snow-swollen stream, the laborers preparing the earth to give its increase. On the right, on the sloping grass, he beheld young colts, too inexperienced yet to seek sustenance where Nature provided it. All seemed in good order, and the air of prosperity. The faithful baron had kept his promises with vigilance.

The young farmer entered his home without having any need to push the door. The entire house, by every one of its yawning windows breathed the merry sunshine. He felt himself happier than he had been for months, almost surprised at a calm that seemed to be broken by no worldly murmur.

"Ah!" thought he, "decidedly, I was cut out for this life! Heavens, can I struggle against her, when in an hour or two I hold her hands in mine; when I behold the blue enchantment of her eyes beaming into mine?"

The chamber was in startling order. Maurice

could see that there had been a regular clearing of the decks," as the old sailor said. His faithful servitor could not be far away.

In the kitchen, amid a cheerful clatter of dishes, he was singing the song he kept for high festivities about the "hoisting of the flag."

Maurice called Rabat, smiling at the amazement he would produce. The blue ribbon of a small package was conspicuous upon the table by the side of a letter bearing his address, and magnetized his attention. Blue ribbons on the prairie! Without a doubt it was one of Irene's surprises. Ah, what a dear and faithful friend! But what could that tangled skein of yellow silk mean that was peeping from the paper?

It was not a skein of silk, but a long cascade of golden hair that fell from Cléguérac's icy fingers. His heart convulsed with horrible anguish—which was, alas! not the agony of doubt. Maurice read the letter. It was from Doctor MacAllan.

"This time I have not been the strong man of the two (wrote the doctor), although I had warning, it seems to me, long enough ago. I swear to you, nevertheless, I cared for her as I would have done for my own daughter. But no single remedy this time seemed to do her any good. To tell you the solemn truth, the poor child died of no known malady. I watched her fall off to sleep, like a tired bird, on the night of Easter Monday.

"Irene told me all; she was the most adorable little martyr I have ever wept for. All that she asked me to do I have religiously done. Here are

the curls she promised you. For years my hand has never trembled at an operation as it did when I ran the cruel scissors across those admirable tresses. But she made me swear by all that I held sacred.

"I do not know your thoughts. The least unkind thing that can happen is a dreadful shock to you. I hope that Rabat, according to our arrangements, has taken certain precautions to break the news to you. He will tell you how we buried her at the foot of her little belvidere, as she desired. A few hours before going away, she sent away her father—who will surprise me greatly if he sees another New Year's day—and dictated these words for your ears only:

"'Passing by my terrace, let my dear friend think that "sister Anne" is ever waiting and watching for him; and, when he is not too busy, he will step up and pay her a little visit.'

"ALEX. MACALLAN."

Long time did Maurice weep before that altar on which blazed the only gold Irene had left behind her after her short passage through the world. He thought of that letter of adieu she had written, one night, roused by that powerful internal voice so impossible not to hearken to. Precisely at the hour he had read that letter, leaving Simone and the graves of Père-Lachaise, the little German had found the sleep that knows no wakening, contented with having obeyed, and lighter in spirit after babbling for the last time—in the midst of so many excuses of her simple tale of love.

Then, without so much as announcing his pres-

ence, Maurice directed his painful dragging footsteps to the terrace where his little friend awaited him. He wished that the first word from his mouth, that awful morning, should be Irene's name, spoken softly, sadly, despairingly beneath the little belvidere.

Mechanically following the footpath, without perceiving anything, he remembered that phrase of Doctor MacAllan's, the previous autumn, which now seemed prophetic, since he had known the lost one so well, at such an hour repeated with infinite pain:

"*I can cure all maladies save* LOVE."